

Empowering Emerging Generations to Become Agents of Change
through Critical Consciousness and Narrative Pedagogies

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Joseph Taylor
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Abstract

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by

Joseph Taylor

Adolescents are influenced by the moving images of films. Research on film and youth socialization reveals a link between film violence and aggressive behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Exposure to film violence leads to increased physical assaults by adolescents. Moreover, adolescents are exploited as passive consumers with discretionary dollars. Marketers exploit images of beautiful and violent characters to purvey films.

As films entertain adolescents, they also shape their views of life. Such images are powerful among youth who are developing an understanding of their identity. These images contain disturbing themes, which demand reflection, including the glamorization of violence and thinness, distorted views of femininity and masculinity, alcohol and drug abuse, and the dehumanization of women. Adolescents need to reflect critically upon their experience of the films.

The literature on how youth ministries utilize film shows that films have not been adequately engaged in youth ministry programs. Many youth ministries do not empower youth to become agents to reflect critically on their experience of films or to resist the passive consumption of their worldviews and mores. Youth need to be empowered to critically engage their experience of films within a youth ministry context. While

pedagogies of empowerment among adolescents have been developed by Frank Rogers, Jr. and David White, they have not been applied to youth ministries through films. This dissertation fulfills the need for such a pedagogy of empowerment.

The pedagogies of Frank Rogers and David White utilized with films can empower adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of films and become agents of change. The early chapters of this dissertation will examine their pedagogies, which can help foster the process of youth socialization. Next, this dissertation will extend their pedagogies by applying them to action, comedy, and horror films in such a way as to enable adolescents to reflect on their experience of films.

The concluding chapters describe my proposed project on an application of the pedagogy. The project calls for listening to the narratives of youth and to their experience of the action, comedy, and horror films. The project generates critical consciousness for adolescents to reflect on their experience of the films. Each session of the project grows out of previous sessions, drawing upon the participants' reflections to shape subsequent sessions and thus further developing the pedagogies. The project examines how the pedagogies can empower the adolescents to become agents of change. It also offers suggestions on issues for further exploration in youth ministry.

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Introduction

Adolescents inhabit the culture of the films they view.¹ Their faith communities would be safe spaces to discuss and deconstruct such films. However, they are not taught in their faith communities to reflect critically upon their experience of these filmic narratives. Without a context in which they can examine and analyze films, youth are domesticated culturally and become vulnerable to absorbing their mores and worldviews. This dissertation will examine the pedagogies of Frank Rogers, Jr. and David White, showing their significance for understanding the context of adolescents, and will develop a pedagogy that empowers² youth to reflect critically upon their socialization and to become agents of change.

Beginning in the 1930s, literature on film and the socialization of youth shows that adolescents in the U. S. are influenced by the moving images of films.³ To cite a current example, a quasi-experimental field study reveals a link between the viewing of symbolic violence in film and cathartic aggressive behavior among youth.⁴ In general, youth who view such images express more violence in their relationships with their peers than those who do not. For example, exposure to filmic violence can lead to increased physical assaults by adolescent males.⁵ Here we are not including other factors that might contribute to violence. In a home for delinquent boys, those who were exposed to filmic

¹ See President and Fellows of Harvard College, "Movie Survey," Balanced Assessment in Mathematics Program, <http://balancedassessment.concord.org/docs/hs057.doc>.

² While individuals empower themselves, i.e., invest themselves with power or authority, others can facilitate the process of empowerment.

³ Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

⁴ See Jacques-Philippe Leyens, Ross D. Parke, Leoncio Camino, and Leonard Berkowitz, "Effects of Movie Violence on Aggression in a Field Setting as a Function of Group Dominance and Cohesion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 346-360.

⁵ Leonard Berkowitz, *Aggression: Its Causes, Consequences, and Control* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 359.

violence engaged in significantly more physical assaults upon their peers than did those who did not watch the violent films. In another field study at a minimum-security penal institution for juvenile offenders, researchers found similar effects upon the frequency of physical assaults.⁶ Adolescents are exploited as passive yet prime consumers with both leisure time and discretionary dollars.⁷ Marketers exploit images of beautiful, energetic, and/or violent adolescents to purvey films.

The images of the films do not merely entertain adolescents; they also shape their views of life and the role of adolescents in it. Such images are powerful among youth who are developing an understanding of the significance of their lives. These images contain disturbing themes that demand reflection, such as the glorification of violence, distorted views of masculinity and femininity, alcohol and substance abuse, the glamorization of thinness, and the dehumanization of women. Identification with such images can place adolescents at risk. When beauty is equated with thinness, girls may suffer from anorexia or bulimia to emulate such images, and when danger and violence is glamorized, adolescent males may assault adolescent females or drive while intoxicated to emulate images. Thus, adolescents need to reflect critically upon their experience of films.

The literature on the use of film in youth ministries suggests that films have not been engaged adequately in these contexts. Typically, film has been used in one of the following five ways in faith communities: 1) Film as entertainment, 2) Film as illustrations for youth program talks and sermons, 3) Film as youth program conversation

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See David F. White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 17. In the U. S. after World War II, adolescents began to receive allowances from their parents. Rather than empowering youth, this disposable income led to consumerism and exploitation by marketers, pandering to the wants, in contrast to the needs, of adolescents.

starters, activities, and prayers, 4) Film utilized to teach faith lessons and discuss faith issues, and 5) Films as programs for retreats. These five uses of film reveal a domestication of youth by youth ministries and publishers. None of the five uses empowers youth to be agents to reflect critically on their experience of films, or to resist the passive consumption of the worldviews and mores of the films. Youth need to be encouraged to critically engage with their experience of the films within the ministries. While pedagogies of empowerment among adolescents have been developed by Frank Rogers, Jr.⁸ and David White,⁹ they have not been applied to youth ministries with regard to films. This dissertation fulfills the need for such pedagogy of empowerment.

Applying the pedagogies of Frank Rogers and David White to films can empower adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of films and become agents of change. This dissertation will examine the pedagogies of Frank Rogers, Jr. and David White in order to illuminate the process of youth socialization. This dissertation will extend these pedagogies by the utilization of action, comedy, and horror films to enable adolescents to reflect upon their experience of films.

Chapter 1 describes the influence of films upon adolescents. This chapter examines the socialization of youth as well as the influence of films upon them. The chapter offers evidence for the pervading presence of film as illustrated by the amount of money adolescents spend upon them, the marketing of films to youth, and the nature of the celebrity culture. The chapter includes my critique of films that adolescents view, the problematic content of these films, and the influence of such content upon youth.

⁸ See Frank Rogers, Jr., *Finding God in the Graffiti* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011).

⁹ See White, *Practicing Discernment*.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review on the use of films by youth ministers of adolescents. The chapter will offer summaries of the ways in which film is used in contexts of youth ministry and a typology of the current practice. It will show how none of the common uses of film in ministry empower youth to become agents of change to reflect critically on films. This lack will point to the need for the establishment of such pedagogy of empowerment.

Chapter 3 examines the theological and faith significance of narrative. It reveals that the narratives of the youth and their communities form adolescent identities. Marketers targeting the youth can perpetuate destructive narratives. Utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies can bring to adolescents' awareness the ideological assumptions of filmic narratives. And critical reflection upon such narratives can allow youth to dream of alternative values to the negative ones portrayed in films.

Chapter 4 analyzes the educational pedagogies of David F. White and Frank Rogers, Jr. The chapter begins by examining the critical pedagogies of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal that they draw upon in their work. Utilizing the critical pedagogies, White's work addresses the need for youth to engage in a practice of critical consciousness. This includes an understanding of the cultural powers that make up adolescent life, the ways God works in them, and how youth can challenge oppressive cultural influences. Rogers' work reveals how youth make meaning and construct identity through narrative, the influence of narratives upon youth, and the significance of our faith tradition in offering alternative narratives that empower the lives of youth. Rogers also discusses the significance of narrative art forms, such as creative writing, theater

exercises, and dramatic presentations, to nurture theological reflection, spiritual growth, and empowerment.¹⁰

Chapter 5 is a description of the researcher's approach drawing upon the pedagogies of Rogers and White to enable adolescents to reflect upon their experience of films for theological development and empowerment. This approach allows adolescents to explore their experience of the content of the narratives in the films that they resonate with.¹¹

Chapter 6 describes the researcher's pilot project in light of the results of the application of the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies. The project calls for listening to the narratives of the youth and to their experience of action, comedy, and horror films that they view. The researcher led the pilot project groups weekly for thirteen weeks. The project gathered data on the efficacy of the pedagogies upon the generation of critical consciousness to engage the adolescents' experience of the films.¹² The chapter offers suggestions on issues for further exploration in youth ministry.

The research method employed in this dissertation is that of qualitative research, utilizing participatory action research. This dissertation will seek to observe insights,

¹⁰ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 15.

¹¹ After viewing the films, the youth will highlight scenes that resonate with their experience. The youth can discuss how they are able to relate to the experiences of the characters in the films. Furthermore, the pedagogy allows the youth to engage with relevant narratives of their faith in dialog with their experience of the films. Here the youth reflect on the narratives and/or symbols of their faith that are relevant to the theological content of the action, comedy, and horror films. And they can explore the insights that emerge when their experience of the stories of the films and their faith traditions are engaged through a dialog. Also, the pedagogy allows them to envision the implications of their reflections for narrating their lives. The youth can reflect upon their experience of the resolutions to the issues and problems portrayed in the films. The youth can reflect on how they might offer an alternative ending or resolution. Then the youth can envision themselves as agents of change to find hope and narrate the stories of their lives with new meaning. Thus their reflection on their experience of the problems and issues in the films and their faith narratives can enable them to deal with the issues and problems of their lives.

¹² We reflected on the sessions weekly and drew upon our reflection to shape the forthcoming session as we sought to develop the pedagogies. We examined how the pedagogies can empower the adolescents to become agents of change.

patterns, and reflections upon the experiences and understandings of the content of films as described by the participants of the group, consisting of adolescents of youth ministries between the ages of twelve and twenty and of ethnic diversity¹³ from faith communities in Northeast Los Angeles.

The pedagogies of Rogers and White allow adolescents to express their experiences and narratives for empowerment. Drawing upon their pedagogies, the researcher's trial research group allows youth to express their voices for the development of their empowerment. Emerging practices are as follows: 1) The expression of new narratives by adolescents as agents of change in their communities,¹⁴ 2) A greater understanding of empowerment among adolescents,¹⁵ and 3) The instilling of hope for the future of adolescents as agents of change in the face of the challenges of adolescent culture.¹⁶

The dissertation will examine literature on film and the socialization of youth as well as literature on youth ministry and film. It will also discuss the pedagogies of White and Rogers, which offer empowering pedagogies for adolescents to reflect critically.¹⁷

¹³ The diverse group consisted of African American, Asian American, and Latino adolescents, as well as individuals of the dominant culture.

¹⁴ The adolescents learned to reflect critically upon the meanings and implications of the intersection among the narratives of their lives, the narratives of the Christian faith, and the narratives of the action, comedy, and drama films.

¹⁵ Such empowerment comes through critical reflection in their engagement of films in their youth ministries.

¹⁶ Through the influence of films pandered by marketers, adolescents are domesticated culturally and become vulnerable to absorbing their mores and worldviews.

¹⁷ See White, *Practicing Discernment*. In this work, White addresses critical consciousness. He reveals that adolescent life is more complex than in earlier, more traditional cultures and calls faith communities to engage a practice of discernment. Such critical consciousness entails understanding socio-cultural influences, religious traditions, and economic and political forces. In other words, critical consciousness needs to include an understanding of the social and cultural powers of adolescent life, the ways in which God works in the midst of them, and how youth can participate in challenging oppressive cultural forces. See also Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*. The narrative pedagogies of Frank Rogers reveal the following: youth

The scope of this dissertation focuses upon the pedagogies of David White and Frank Rogers, Jr. These pedagogies, as well as insights from youth ministry, will be used to address disempowered youth. These areas will be used to develop a pedagogy utilizing action, comedy, and horror films to empower adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of films and to become agents of change. In terms of limitations, the study will only look at the pedagogies of Frank Rogers, Jr. and David White, Christian youth ministry, socialization among adolescents, and a U.S. American context.

The dissertation will contribute to the following discourses: the pedagogies of Frank Rogers, Jr. and David White, and socialization among adolescents. The dissertation will critically examine the narrative pedagogies of Frank Rogers, Jr., and the pedagogy of critical consciousness of David White.¹⁸ There exist no studies on the use of the use of these pedagogies utilizing action, comedy, and horror films to analyze the experience of adolescents of these films. The dissertation will bridge the gaps in the literature on youth ministry and socialization among adolescents by facilitating a dialog between them. This will help youth ministry scholars and/or practitioners to become more effective in empowering adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of films.

make meaning and construct identity through narrative, youth are inundated by media with narratives influencing their experiences, the Christian tradition offers alternative narratives, which empower lives of compassion and commitment to the common good, and narrative art forms offer methods that nurture theological reflection, spiritual nurture, and empowerment. These scholars engage the challenges of youth ministry and offer visions for such ministry.

¹⁸ Roger's pedagogies use narrative art forms in order to foster theological reflection and empowerment. White's pedagogy reveals that adolescent life is more complex than in earlier, more traditional cultures and calls faith communities to engage a practice of critical consciousness, which entails understanding socio-cultural influences, religious traditions, and economic and political forces. In other words, critical consciousness includes an understanding of the social and cultural powers of adolescent life, the ways in which God works in the midst of them, and how youth can participate in challenging oppressive cultural forces.

Chapter 1

Socialization

Socialization is the process through which individuals learn the values, norms, and roles of their culture and, in turn, develop their sense of self. Occurring throughout their lives, it is a process through which the self is developed by cultural influences. Socialization plays a significant role in the lives of individuals who are shaped by cultural influences. Among such agents of socialization is the media, including films. Such films need to be critiqued. Too often they contain problematic content that might influence youth. Thus I will begin this discussion about socialization by sharing the voices of theorists who have studied it.

George H. Mead is a formative figure in forming the symbolic interactionist view and its relationship with socialization. He drew upon behaviorism, an approach, which emphasizes the effects of rewards and punishment upon behavior. Behaviorism arose during the late nineteenth century to challenge the belief that behavior results primarily from inborn instincts and drives. Behaviorists emphasized the significance of social learning, the learning that occurs from observing and imitating others. Mead drew upon these insights, emphasizing the significance of rewards and punishments upon shaping behavior. He believed that individuals interpret the significance of words and other symbols that serve as rewards and punishments in human interaction.

Mead drew upon the insights of Charles H. Cooley, who developed the theory of the looking-glass self. This is the belief that one uses other individuals as a mirror with which to view oneself. According to Cooley, individuals are forming ideas constantly

about how others perceive and judge them. These ideas serve as significant rewards and punishments as individuals formulate their own self-image, which forms the basis of their interactions with others.

Cooley recognized that the process in which we continually reevaluate and alter our behavior based upon social interaction is complex. All of the “others” are not the same in contributing to our self-image. Cooley argues that primary groups, individuals whose approval and affection we most desire, are thus more significant to the development of our self-concept. Among the most significant early primary groups are family and friends. Yet even secondary groups; which are large, impersonal, and often involve temporary relationships; can be significant as well, and the looking-glass self continues to develop throughout an individual’s life. Both primary and secondary groups can serve as reference groups for both provide standards for judging one’s attitudes and behaviors.

Mead’s concept of role-taking, the ability to imagine what it is like to be in the roles of others, draws upon Cooley’s notion of the looking-glass self. Role-taking is a significant aspect of socialization. Through role-taking, individuals see themselves from another individual’s point of view and, thus, are rewarded or punished according to the self-image he or she acquires through the eyes of others.

Mead argued that children learn the abilities to engage in more complex role-taking in stages resulting in a more complete sense of identity:¹ 1) During the preparatory stage, children relate to their environment as though they were the center of it. During

¹ See George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934). According to Mead, socialization consists partly of overcoming the egocentrism of the infant and learning to see oneself through the eyes of other individuals and eventually society. Thus as we are socialized, we increasingly acquire a social self.

this time, they interact through imitation yet do not comprehend the meaning of the interaction. They identify significant others and seek their approval. The “me” is forming in the background along with a sense of self. They do not engage in true role-taking as they respond to aspects in their immediate environment. Yet even at an early age, children are capable of some role-taking as is expressed in their playful interactions. 2) During the play stage, children model other individuals in their play. Thus they are moving beyond imitation of others to acting out imagined roles one at a time. Mead refers to this as taking the role of particular others, significant individuals whose models are most significant to imitate. For example, a child might play at being a parent. Yet according to Mead, children do not yet acquire the complex sense of self, which stems from the ability to see oneself through the eyes of many different individuals. 3) The game stage is marked by such an ability to take on the roles of several individuals at once. Mead explains that in order to play a game, it is necessary to understand the role of others involved, simultaneously keeping a number of such roles in mind. Complex games, including team sports, require this ability. This is a more complex form of role-taking than that occurring in simple play. 4) The adult stage. The game stage enables the child eventually to enter the adult stage by taking on the role of the generalized other, the sense acquired by socialized adults that society has norms and values by which people evaluate themselves. While initially the child’s generalized other may consist only of the other children involved in a game, eventually he or she learns to take on the attitude of society. This is a significant step. It entails conforming to a set of abstract principles that may or may not serve the child’s self-interest. Here the individual is capable of understanding complex cultural symbols.

Mead asserted that the self is comprised of two components. He called the first component the “I,” the aspect of the self that is spontaneous, creative, impulsive, and unpredictable at times. He called the second component of the self the “me,” which is the socialized self that makes an individual concerned about how others view and judge her or him. The “I” represents innovation, while the “me” represents social convention and conformity. When the “I” initiates a spontaneous act, the “me” raises society’s response.² Actions are interrupted constantly by such thoughts, which may occur so quickly that an individual is not even aware that they are occurring. They form a powerful source of social control and conformity.

Sigmund Freud founded the field of psychoanalysis, an approach to psychology that emphasizes the reasoning processes of the mind. He emphasized the importance of childhood socialization, arguing that the basic personality is established as early as age five.³ According to Freud, the personality has three parts. These parts are the following: 1) Id, 2) Superego, and 3) Ego.⁴ 1) The id is an individual’s biological drives and impulses. It is selfish, irrational, and constantly seeks pleasure and gratification. It is unconscious. Newborns are driven by id. They constantly seek instant gratification for food, physical contact, and care. Thus they need to be socialized into learning that such gratification is not always possible. According to Freud, the reality principle requires that the members of a society renounce part of their desires for immediate pleasure in order to do the work necessary for the society to operate smoothly. Socialization is thus a responsibility of parents. 2) The superego is the term for all of the norms, values, and

² See Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*.

³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961).

⁴ The id is selfish, irrational, continuously striving for pleasure and gratification, and unconscious. The ego is the self. It is the core of what is an individual’s personality. The superego consists of the values and norms of society that are internalized by the individual.

morals learned through socialization. These aspects of the superego form the demands of society and are internalized as an individual's conscience. Working in tension with the biologically-based desires of the id, the superego controls the id. 3) The ego is the third component of the personality that acts as a mediator between the biological drives and the society, which denies them.⁵ As the ego shapes the desires of the id according to the demands of the superego, the children will grow up to become socialized adults, conforming to society's norms and values. Notably, this battle can wound the child's ego. Desires, which are repressed during the early years of life, do not completely disappear. Instead, they are buried in the unconscious mind, where they can continue to affect an individual's life. Thus although a society socializes its members to a high degree of cultural conformity, it can wound their psychological health.⁶

Since an individual's basic personality is established early in life, change does not take place easily for adults. This is especially true if an individual suffers from troubles that stem from experiences in the unconscious mind. According to Freud, individuals must become conscious of the repressed experiences affecting their behavior in order to deal with them. Thus his theory presented techniques to access buried experiences. By bringing such experiences into conscious awareness, an individual can deal with them to overcome their influence on behavior.

Jean Piaget examined how children develop intelligence, thinking, and reasoning.⁷ His theory of cognitive development, based upon studies of children playing, argues that the ability to make logical decisions increases as an individual grows older. Piaget also noted that infants are egocentric, experiencing their environment as if it were centered

⁵ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jean Piaget, *The Language and Thought of the Child* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926).

around them. Socialization requires an increasing ability to use language and symbols in order to think abstractly and logically and to see things from multiple perspectives. Piaget believed that while cognitive development involved much social learning, there is also a biological component. Thus a stage cannot be achieved until a child's mind has achieved a level of physiological development.

Piaget developed a theory of moral development that argued that individuals at various stages learn to act according to abstract ideas about justice or fairness. For young children, rules are absolute. By playing games and engaging in other group activities, they begin to realize that rules are composed by the group and, thus, can be changed if the circumstances change. They learn to take the standpoint of others, and they realize that there is usually more than one side to an issue. Eventually, children develop abstract notions of fairness, learning that rules should be judged relative to the circumstances.

Lawrence Kohlberg examined the responses of individuals who were confronted with moral dilemmas, which they were asked to resolve. By evaluating their responses, he was able to develop a theory of moral development. To determine which stage of moral development an individual is in, Kohlberg presented a scenario to participants involving a dying woman whose husband is unable to afford medicine that can save her life, and a pharmacist who will not sell it at a lower cost or allow the husband to pay for it at another time. Eventually the husband breaks into the pharmacy and steals the medicine. Kohlberg asked his subjects what they would have done, emphasizing that there was no right or wrong answer.

Kohlberg argues that moral development like cognitive ability also occurs in the following stages: 1) Preconventional stage, 2) Conventional stage, and 3)

Postconventional stage. 1) People seek to avoid punishment or achieve personal gain during the preconventional stage. They follow the rules in order to stay out of trouble. 2) The individual seeks social approval during the conventional stage. The person is socialized into society's norms and values, and would feel guilty about violating them. Kohlberg argues that adolescents are at the conventional stage. Thus they would condemn the husband's behavior, believing that moral behavior is what is approved and needed. 3) The individual has general, abstract notions of right and wrong during the postconventional stage. Even though the husband has broken the law; such law-breaking is weighed against the moral cost of sacrificing his wife's life. People at the highest level of postconventional morality will go beyond social convention. According to Kohlberg, few adults reach this highest stage.⁸

AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION

The Family and Socialization

The family plays a significant role in socialization. During the early years of an individual's life, the family shapes the individual's developing identity, self-esteem, and personality. In various societies, some children are raised in families consisting of blood-related parents and siblings. However, there are variations on the structure of family relations. In some cultures, the family consists of an extended group of individuals.

In the United States, family socialization differs somewhat depending upon race and ethnicity. For example, some African American families share responsibility for

⁸ Lawrence Kohlberg, "A Cognitive-Developmental Analysis of Children's Sex-Role Concepts and Attitudes," in *The Development of Sex Difference*, ed. Eleanor E. Macoby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), 89.

child-rearing among a broad range of family members, reflecting a sense that the raising of children is the responsibility of extended families and communities.⁹

Because of the diversity of U. S. culture, it is difficult to describe the typical American family. Family patterns are changing rapidly. The average number of children in a family has declined. Mothers are more likely to be employed at a full-time job out of the home. More children are being raised by single parents as well.

Child-rearing practices also differ among families of different social classes. Parents whose jobs require them to work under authoritarian structures might emphasize the importance of respect for authority within the family. On the other hand, parents whose work gives them freedom to make decisions and be creative might socialize their children into the norms of creativity and spontaneity. While some working-class jobs demand conformity and some middle-class jobs and upper-middle class jobs might emphasize independence, such workplace differences are often associated with social class.¹⁰ These differences are more the result of the parents' experiences at work than social class. When middle-class or upper-middle-class parents hold jobs under authoritarian structures, often their socialization practices emphasize respect for authority. Also, when working-class parents hold jobs that provide a measure of independence, their socialization practices often emphasize such independence.

⁹ Phillips Cutright, "Neighborhood Social Structure and the lives of Black and White Children," *Sociological Focus* 27, no. 3 (1995): 24-55.

¹⁰ Jill R. Bardwell, Samuel W. Cochran, and Sharon Walker, "Relationship of Parental Education, Race, and Gender to Sex-Role Stereotyping in Five-Year-Old Kindergarteners," *Sex Roles* 15 (1986): 275-81.

The School and Socialization

Before the twentieth century, many individuals lived and worked on family farms. School was less important than family as an agent of socialization. Children in rural areas of the United States often started school later in life, spent fewer hours in the classroom, and were out of school for longer periods during the harvest and planting seasons. However among our urbanized, industrialized populations today, education has taken a more significant role in socialization. Children often begin education when they enter schools at an early age and remain in school for longer hours each day and for more days each year than was the case in the past.

The significance of education as socialization for entering the workplace has increased as well. Such socialization extends beyond the intellectual skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. Today schools might be expected to develop inquiring attitudes as well as social skills. Thus in addition to presenting the academic curriculum, schools offer a hidden curriculum, including the informal norms from inside and outside the classroom.

Peers and Socialization

While children become more aware of the world outside the family, peers play a significant role in socialization. Such peer groups consist of individuals of the same age who typically share the same interests and positions. This process of socialization begins with the first peer contacts outside the family, when the child begins to play with other children during the early years of life. The significance of peer group interactions

increases during adolescence and into adulthood.¹¹ During adolescence, new language variations, values, standards of dress, taste in popular culture, including films, and new interpersonal relationships develop. Children who learned at home to be polite might find other standards applied to their behavior by their adolescent peers. Not all peers are equal. Friendships constitute significant peer associations that influence the socialization process. Peer socialization often depends upon the friends children happen to have. Often this reflects circumstances over which children might exercise little control, such as where they live or attend a school. The attractiveness of some friends rather than others is also influenced by what children learn in their family including their self-concept.

Socialization and Religious Education

Horace Bushnell is a formative figure among theorists who recommend a socialization approach to Christian formation. His insights on Christian nurture were written in the 1840s, but they have relevance today. Bushnell expressed many of the insights found later in the social sciences.

Notably, Bushnell's view contrasted with the traditional revival technique for bringing up children in a knowledge of and relationship with God. In the 1840s, revivalism emerged again in the United States. Charles Finney led such revivals during the nineteenth century as did Jonathan Edwards during the eighteenth century. In response to his question, "What is the true idea of Christian education?" Bushnell answered

that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being

¹¹ Keunho Keefe and Thomas J. Berndt, "Relations of Friendship Quality to Self-Esteem in Early Adolescence," *Journal of Early Adolescence* 16, no. 1 (1966): 110-29.

otherwise. In other words, the aim, effort, and expectation should be, not as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.¹²

Bushnell's view was that religious education should nurture the religious seed, which was already present in the child. Bushnell's book, *Christian Nurture*,¹³ is a formative work. The first edition of it was published in 1847 as *Views of Christian Nurture and Subjects Adjacent Thereto*. His proposal for a religious education based on the concepts of growth and nurture was a way to teach children about how they should live. Bushnell's contribution to religious education is that he presented the insights that were foundational for the theoretical and practical perspective, which became characteristic of the socio-cultural theoretical approach to religious education.

Another influential religious educator was George Albert Coe who authored *A Social Theory of Religious Education*.¹⁴ He was influenced by the Social Gospel movement. In his work, he upheld the socialization model. His theoretical position is a socio-cultural approach. *A Social Theory of Religious Education* is an extension and application of the principles underlying this approach. In his work, he viewed the whole social reality as a primary educator. Thus he believed that all education should be a process of social interaction. According to Coe, "the central fact of the educative process

¹² Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: C. Scribner, 1861), 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ George Albert Coe, *A Social Theory of Education* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1917).

is a growing Christian experience in and through the pupil's social interactions."¹⁵ Here, social interaction is at the heart of Christian education not only as the process but also the content. According to Coe, "The primary 'content of the curriculum' is to be found in present relations and interactions between persons."¹⁶ Just as action speaks more loudly than words, the lived example of a member of a community of faith can speak more loudly than the written curriculum of ministry publishers.

In addressing the purpose of Christian religious education, Coe posed a question, which has significance today: "Shall the primary purpose of Christian education be to hand on a religion, or to create a new world?"¹⁷ When he reflected upon the problems of religious education under the presuppositions of modern science, Coe considered whether traditional theologically-derived aims and teaching practices might be problematic. Thus he argued that the traditional aim of individual salvation needed to be replaced by the purpose of social reconstruction and that teaching practices, which focused upon the transmission of knowledge, might need to be balanced with participation in social interactions. Thus Coe's view of religious education contrasts with the traditional theological position that the teacher is an instrument of the church transmitting faith to the student.

Coe argued that the aims of education are social adjustment and the development of children's religious nature.¹⁸ He emphasized the creation of a new world, which demands creative education rather than that which simply transmits knowledge. Such creative education emphasizes social reconstruction. According to Coe, such social

¹⁵ Ibid., 80.

¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷ George Albert Coe, *What is Christian Education?* (New York: Scribners, 1929), 29.

¹⁸ George Albert Coe, *Education in Religion and Morals* (New York: Revell, 1907), 14.

reconstruction must prepare the path for the democracy of God.¹⁹ This is a phrase Coe used to refer to the kingdom of God. Such social reconstruction is significant because “reconstruction, continuous reconstruction, is of the essence of the divine work in and through the human.”²⁰ Coe’s insight calls religious educators to share a concern for the social reality by which we are socialized. According to Coe, when we take the reality of socialization seriously, then our focus is not simply upon the quality of a Christian family life, but also upon reform and reconstruction of the social ethos, which shapes us even as we need to shape it toward the democracy of God.

C. Ellis Nelson advocated a faith enculturation approach to Christian education. He was the chair of the Department of Religious Education at Union Theological Seminary in New York and later became President of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. In 1965, he delivered the Sprunt lectures at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. These were published as a book called *Where Faith Begins*.²¹ This work and *How Faith Matures*²² were significant contributions, which continue to shape Religious Education.

Nelson’s *Where Faith Begins* examines the thesis that faith is communicated as persons of faith interact with others. For Nelson, a significant issue is to identify ways in which this socialization process can be made more intentional and effective. Nelson asks the question: How is the Christian faith communicated from one generation to the next? According to Nelson, religious individuals have provided various answers to the

¹⁹ Coe, *What is Christian Education?*, 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33-54.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² C. Ellis Nelson, *How Faith Matures* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989). Here he argues that an individual’s faith matures when life experiences are interpreted in view of the Christian tradition in order to understand and do the will of God in the ongoing experiences of the individual.

question. However by drawing upon the social sciences, he developed a model of faith communication. He noted that social scientists offer a description of how culture is transmitted from generation to generation. Here Nelson argues that this is the “closest thing we have to an analysis of how faith is communicated.”²³ Nelson addresses the questions, “How does a person develop trust in God, and what does that faith mean in his life?” His concerns are about the nature of faith, how it is transmitted, and how it is developed into meaning, which can be communicated. Nelson argues “that religion at its deepest levels is located within a person’s sentiments and is the result of the way he was socialized by the adults who cared for him as a child.”²⁴ Nelson argues that culture is passed through a process of socialization that establishes a perceptive system in relation to a worldview, forms a conscience according to a value system, and creates an identity out of personal relations within a social group. Such aspects form the core of a Christian identity and the practice of an individual’s faith.

Nelson’s thesis is that “faith is communicated by a community of believers and that the meaning of faith is developed by its members out of their history, by their interaction with each other, and in relation to the events that take place in their lives.”²⁵ Nelson summarizes what social scientists have learned about the ways in which a society transmits its beliefs to succeeding generations. Societies transmit a worldview and set of values. According to Nelson, “because they are an explanation of the world in which we live and the world of social relations which we create,” these are the “forces that shape our lives.”²⁶ These are the essence of culture, and every generation instructs the next

²³ See Nelson, *How Faith Matures*, 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

generation, instilling a guidance system within the individual. According to Nelson, these are a perceptive system so that one sees the world as one was instructed to see, a conscience that rewards or punishes one when one obeys or disobeys the instilled code, and a self-identification which colors all of one's attitudes toward relationships.

Drawing upon the social sciences, Nelson argues that a culture endures if it is deliberate in transmitting itself to the next generation. Thus although the little everyday exchanges might seem casual, they formatively influence us, especially when we are young.²⁷ According to Nelson, within the faith community, parents and adults transmit the beliefs and values of the community to the next generation. Here the nurture theory, which had drawn upon relationship theology, now also drew upon the social sciences. Nelson affirmed that faith in God is the basic reality that Christians can share, and that this faith is communicated according to a mode of natural cultural transmission within a community of believers.²⁸

According to Nelson, Christian faith begins within the Christian community, which is a conscious, voluntary fellowship with a common faith in Christ. Within that community, four functions are significant for developing faith. These are worship, fellowship, searching the Scriptures, and confronting contemporary issues. Notably, Nelsons argues that the true meaning of worship is seen in the celebration of the sacraments, for here the congregation does something, which is dependent upon the past actions of God.

Nelson maintains that the congregation in its total life and work is the educator of its people. Thus younger and older participants learn what faith means not simply by

²⁷ Ibid., 58.

²⁸ Ibid., 30, 34, and 65.

classroom instruction but by participation in the congregation as it seeks to make meaning of events of the world and respond them. Thus the congregation communicates faith not so much by what it says as by what it is and does. The community's buildings and budget, worship, ways of dealing with conflict, and forms of leadership are ways of communicating its core meanings.

Another theorist who drew upon the social sciences was John H. Westerhoff, III. He developed a socialization model of education. His work emphasized this dimension of cultural transmission.²⁹ It has an emphasis upon the transformation of the heritage of the past, the significance of relationships and interconnections, and the awareness of the pervasive influence of the environment.³⁰ Here he argues that "faith is communicated by a community of believers and the meaning of faith is developed by its members out of their history, by their interaction with each other, and in relation to the events that take place in their lives."³¹ Thus he upheld a faith enculturation approach to Christian education. Westerhoff emphasized passing on faith over the schooling paradigm. His emphasis has been upon the communal context of Christian education, recognizing the need to critique narrow instructional models to "focus our attention on the radical nature and character of the church as a faith community."³² Arguing against the instructional paradigm, he called the Church to adopt a faith community paradigm of enculturation.

In *Generation to Generation*, Westerhoff develops a model of Christian education, which he calls religious socialization. Here he refers to "a process consisting of life-long formal and informal mechanisms, through which persons sustain and transmit

²⁹ See John H. Westerhoff, III, and Gwen K. Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974).

³⁰ Here Westerhoff relies more upon a theological approach than a social science one.

³¹ John H. Westerhoff, III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury, 1976), 51.

³² *Ibid.*, 51.

their faith (world view, value system) and life-style.”³³ Here Westerhoff and Gwen Kennedy Neville brought their analysis of cultural systems into a dialog with Christian education.³⁴ Notably, Westerhoff has modified his emphasis on intentional socialization because it implies doing something to someone. Here he has chosen the term enculturation.³⁵ Thus one becomes a product of culture who wishes to be different from that product.

In appealing to the social sciences, Westerhoff critiques the optimism of the early liberalism, which assumed that worthwhile beliefs and values emerge naturally within the course of development. He proposes a new paradigm, upholding an emphasis on the community of faith rather than on schooling. Here Westerhoff aligns with the neo-orthodox tradition as it questions the influence of disciplines aside from a theological one.³⁶ His theory refines the neo-orthodox nurture theory, having a similar urgency to pass Christian beliefs and values from one generation to the next. Yet he also argues that nurture is insufficient, since it leads to a catechesis of conformity.

Here Westerhoff draws upon catechetical theory.³⁷ This theory maintains that catechesis ultimately is community education. Catechesis was viewed as a pastoral ministry which aims to help the faithful, individually and corporately meet the twofold responsibilities which faith asks of them: community with God and community with human beings. Westerhoff utilized the term to point to the enculturation and socialization processes within a community of faith.³⁸ This contrasts with the memorization and the

³³ Westerhoff, III, and Neville, *Generation to Generation*, 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ See John H. Westerhoff, III, “A Call to Catechesis,” *The Living Light* 14, no. 3 (1977): 354-58.

³⁸ See Gwen K. Neville and John H. Westerhoff, III, *Learning through Liturgy* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978).

question-and-answer methods typically used.³⁹ According to Westerhoff, the significant question of catechesis concerns what it means to be Christian together in community and the world.

Westerhoff argues that “the community of faith with all its formal and informal structures is the chief catechist.”⁴⁰ In order for catechesis to be effective, the community needs to undergo a continuous conversion, broadening its horizons and reforming itself through a continuous process of interpreting the shape of its response to the gospel. Westerhoff argued that the Christian tradition can be a transforming tradition if the gospel it upholds is properly internalized⁴¹ and acted upon. Thus the faith community becomes “a community of cultural change acting on behalf of the Gospel.”⁴² He argues that we need to learn to liberate and reform the church and the world. Here he argues that formative Christian religious education can pass on knowledge and an understanding of the Christian narrative, which causes a chain reaction in learners that leads them to new, transforming, and liberating insights. Thus one can be shaped by the church’s tradition into an individual who lives out the gospel. This involves the learner in a critical reassessment of the Christian tradition, particularly on social issues.⁴³

In sum, each of the aforementioned religious educators asserts that children are socialized and that faith is nurtured through socialization. These concepts have developed from the views of revivalism during Horace Bushnell’s day. Bushnell had argued that children need to be nurtured from their infancy. His argument for the socialization of

³⁹ This is reflective of a catechism.

⁴⁰ Bernard Marthaler, “Socialization as a Model for Catechetics,” in *Foundations of Religious Education*, ed. Padraic O’Hare (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 64-92.

⁴¹ John H. Westerhoff, III, “Christian Education: Kerygma vs. Didache,” in *Christianity, Society and Education*, ed. John Ferguson (London: SPCK, 1981), 192-95.

⁴² Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 66.

⁴³ John H. Westerhoff, III, “The Liturgical Imperative of Religious Education,” in *The Religious Education We Need*, ed. James Michael Lee (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1977), 81-82.

children was based upon his notion of an organic unity of society. In other words, all the members of a society have a source of life that connects them. Thus the life of adults, particularly parents, flows to the children similar to the way in which a tree's source of life flows from the roots to the branches. Similarly parents need to ensure that their children receive Christian nurture. George Albert Coe argued that the purpose of the religious education of children should make conversion unnecessary. His view was grounded upon the views of John Dewey. Coe's view that children are socialized was based upon Dewey's view of education as an individual participating in the social consciousness of the race. Such education is based upon the reconstruction of experience that leads to social reconstruction. C. Ellis Nelson's argument for the socialization of children is based upon anthropology. Thus he emphasizes the way that culture is passed to examine the passing of faith. According to Nelson, culture is passed through a process of socialization that establishes a perceptive system in relation to a worldview, forms a conscience according to a value system, and creates a self-identification out of personal relations within a social group. Such aspects form the core of a Christian identity and the practice of an individual's faith. Here Nelson argues that religion is located within children's sentiments and results from the way in which they were socialized by the adults who cared for them. Thus the faith of children is passed from their community of faith. In the argument of John Westerhoff III for the socialization of children, he empathizes that faith is nurtured in a self-conscious intentional community of faith. Here he critiques the church's schooling-instructional paradigm in its socialization of children arguing for socialization from a community of faith. He views such education as an aspect of socialization involving all deliberate efforts to transmit knowledge, attitudes,

values, and behaviors. He views such intentional education among children as a significant agent of socialization.

Each of the aforementioned religious educators also discusses how faith is nurtured through socialization. Arguing that parents need to live lives bearing witness to their faith, Horace Bushnell calls parents to have it first in themselves, and, then, teach it by living it. Upholding the home as the most significant source for nurturing faith, he calls parents to ensure that such an environment is filled with the presence of God's Spirit. According to Bushnell, faith is nurtured by a process of a natural induction, which is supernatural since faith is grown in the atmosphere of God's Spirit filling the home. Here the seeds of faith need to be sown early in life to establish a foundation for further faith nurturing. George Albert Coe argued that faith needs to be nurtured by all social interactions. He maintained that the central fact of education is a growing faith experience through the individual's social interactions. Such social interactions are at the core of nurturing faith in terms of process and content. According to Coe, the content of the curriculum to nurture faith needs to be in interactions among individuals. Discussing how faith is nurtured through socialization, Coe asked whether the aim is to pass on faith or create a new world. He upheld the latter, calling for creative education. Here he draws upon Dewey, advocating creative education that emphasizes social reconstruction, for our social world impacts us just as we are called to impact it. In C. Ellis Nelson's discussion on how faith is nurtured, he argues that the agent for nurturing faith is the community of faith. Here faith is nurtured through worship, which incubates the faith; fellowship, which makes the faith operational; searching, which makes faith meaningful; and confronting issues, which makes faith ethically alive. In the discussion on how faith is nurtured

through socialization, Westerhoff offers a call for catechesis. Wary of a hidden curriculum in the socialization of the church, he calls the church to nurture a faith allowing its members to think politically, socially, economically, theologically, and ethnically. Drawing upon anthropology, Westerhoff upholds the use of liturgies, rituals, and symbols to nurture faith. For example, faith is nurtured through socialization during worship services as the church engages liturgies and rituals to celebrate its faith. Weaving learning, rituals, and liturgy, faith can be nurtured and passed from generation to generation.

The Media and Socialization

Donald F. Roberts, Ulla G. Foehr, and Victoria Rideout, authors of *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds*, argue that adolescents are inundated by the media.⁴⁴ In America according to their study, the average young person possesses three televisions, four CD and/or tape players, three VCR and/or DVD players, two video game players, and one computer. Moreover, the media has infiltrated the young person's room.⁴⁵ Notably sixty-eight percent of young people between eight and eighteen years of age possess a television in their bedroom, fifty-four percent have their own VCR and/or DVD player, and forty-nine percent have a video game player connected to their own television.

The average young person spends 6.5 hours per day utilizing the media.⁴⁶ Furthermore according to the findings of Roberts and his colleagues, parents do not have

⁴⁴ See Donald F. Roberts, Ulla G. Foehr, and Victoria Rideout, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds* (Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, 2005).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

much influence upon their child's media experiences.⁴⁷ Approximately fifty-three percent of the young people in their study indicated that there exist no rules in their households on what they may view. Twenty-three percent said their homes did have such rules. However, the young people were seldom kept accountable to them.

Access to computers is connected with level of income. Approximately seventy-eight percent of young people among families with annual incomes of less than \$35,000 have access to a home computer.⁴⁸ Approximately ninety-three percent of families with incomes greater than \$50,000 have access to computers.⁴⁹ Notably, children in low-income families are less likely to have an Internet connection.

In view of the length of time that young people spend with media, the lack of parental awareness and influence upon exposure to the media, and the reduced time during which young people spend with other socializing agents, I am concerned about the influence of the media upon the socialization of young people. Their engagement with the media means that they are being socialized by the media. Furthermore, it influences their attitudes, behaviors, and values. Since the implementation of the Payne Fund studies noted below, the media has obtained greater influence in socializing young people while others agents of socialization, such as parents, communities of faith, and schools, have lost more influence. Due to the problematic content of the media that young people view, we should critically upon the negative influences of the media and investigate the power of positive socialization. The following section examines research on the influence of film upon young people.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Socialization and Film

Beginning in the 1930s, literature on film and the socialization of youth has revealed how adolescents in the United States have been influenced by the moving images of films.⁵⁰ Here the Payne Fund studies are foundational. These studies were conducted under the auspices of the Motion Picture Research Council. This was a group founded for the purpose of promoting research on movies and society with financial resources from the Payne Fund. The goal of the research was to provide dispassionate, objective data concerning the influence of movie attendance on children. The movies had developed rapidly and were a major entertainment activity, particularly for adolescents, before World War I.⁵¹ Consequently, films were an object of social controversy and significant research by the early 1930s.

The Payne Fund studies are striking in their utilization of diverse social psychological approaches to studies drawing upon a range of research methods. These include physiological measures and experimental methods, rating scales, attitude and information-acquisition scales, questionnaires, interviews and life histories, and content analysis. Various aspects of effects were assessed, including effects upon emotions, sleep loss, attitudes and information about various issues, school performance, ratings by instructors, delinquent conduct, and general attitudes.⁵² Researchers conducted content analyses of the themes of feature films and assigned ratings to the relationship of depicted behaviors to social mores.

⁵⁰ See Henry James Forman, *Our Movie Made Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

⁵¹ Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

⁵² Ibid.

The Payne Fund studies utilized diverse approaches to conduct research on communication, on the multiple and complex ways of conceptualizing the question of effects, and on efforts to deal with communication as a social and psychological process. In the early 1930s, the results of the studies provided an essential understanding of effects from a range of individual and situational characteristics, including age, sex, predispositions, perceptions, past behavior patterns and experiences, social background, and parental influence.⁵³

In terms of the validity of the Payne Fund studies, the findings reflected the impact of film at the time of the studies upon emotions, attitudes, and conduct. Of course, the conclusions of the Payne Fund studies do not accurately reflect the influence of film during our time. Our media environment contrasts starkly with the environment during the time of the studies. In terms of access to the media, adolescents today live in a vastly different context. Nevertheless, the Payne Fund studies bear considerable significance. They were groundbreaking studies, which were foundational to subsequent media research. Also, they addressed the concerns of communities on the impact of film utilizing the best scientific methods at that time. Moreover, they contribute to this examination of the impact of film upon attitudes, use of film, content analysis, and the meaning-making of adolescents.

While the Payne Fund studies began to examine questions that would become the foundation of further research in film, the groundbreaking work of the Payne Fund studies became neglected in the years following their release. Later in 1947, Franklin Fearing, a researcher in psychology, referred to the Payne Fund Studies. Then in 1950, Leo Handel also drew upon the Payne Fund Studies, while noting problems of the

⁵³ Ibid.

studies. Then, again, there appeared a gap in the literature on such studies of film and socialization until the 1960s, when Arthur Bandura presented his theories on the influence of viewing films.

In a series of experiments, Arthur Bandura and his colleagues exposed children to a filmed model who engaged in violent behaviors directed against a plastic, inflatable doll.⁵⁴ Afterward, children were taken to a room that contained a number of items, including an inflatable doll. Then their behaviors were observed from behind a one-way mirror. The purpose of such research was to investigate the circumstances under which children would learn and imitate aggressive acts, which they had viewed on film. The researchers found that children who were exposed to a violent model were more likely to act aggressively than children in control groups who had not viewed such violence.⁵⁵ Furthermore, children who had been rewarded were more likely to imitate a violent model than those who had been punished. In general, children imitated the model as long as no punishment took place. Here the absence of punishment served as a reward for such behavior.⁵⁶ Bandura and his colleagues also found that children could learn aggressive responses from an animated character as well as from an adult.⁵⁷

In terms of the validity of Bandura's studies, today they are considered too behavioristic. In other words, they focus too narrowly upon reinforcements and how individuals act. A more current perspective recognizes that cognitive processes, including

⁵⁴ Albert Bandura, Dorthea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross, "Transmission of Aggression through Imitation of Aggressive Models," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 63, no. 3 (1961): 575-82. Cf. Albert Bandura, Dorthea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross, "Imitation of Film-Media to Aggressive Models," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66, no. 1 (1963): 3-11. Cf. also, Albert Bandura, Dorthea Ross, and Sheila A. Ross, "Various Reinforcement and Imitative Learning," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67, no. 6 (1963): 601-07.

⁵⁵ Bandura, Ross, and Ross, "Transmission of Aggression."

⁵⁶ Albert Bandura, "Influence of Model's Reinforcement Contingencies on the Acquisition of Imitative Response," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1 (1965): 589-95.

⁵⁷ Bandura, Ross, and Ross, "Imitation of Film-Media."

attention and retention, are aspects of observational learning. Such activities emphasize how young people construe meaning symbolically, making sense of a model's behavior. Thus young people give attention selectively to various aspects of a model's behavior, have different experiences with which to interpret and evaluate the model's actions, and memorize different data. Such cognitive processes reveal how some young people might imitate a model while others might not. Bandura's studies offer a helpful foundation for understanding how young people can learn behaviors from violent images in film.

According to the research of Patrick E. Jamieson and his colleagues, the portrayal of suicide in popular movies has increased recently.⁵⁸ Moreover, these researchers have found that such movies also frequently depict the care of mental illnesses. They argue that among adolescents who were depressed and suicidal, the frequent watching of movies with mentally disturbed characters is connected with less confidence in the effectiveness of mental health treatments. Such films glamorize suicide while not revealing helpful coping techniques. Thus they instruct adolescents about the ineffectiveness of seeking help. In terms of the validity of Jamieson's research, the findings pertain to the experiences of depressed and suicidal youth. Furthermore, one might argue that depressed and suicidal adolescents who view such movies might already maintain skepticism about the effectiveness of treatments. Nevertheless, Jamieson's research enhances our ability understand and care for adolescents who are troubled and wounded. It bolsters the project of helping youth to reflect critically upon the problematic narratives of popular films.

⁵⁸ See Patrick E. Jamieson, Daniel Romer, and Kathleen H. Jamieson, "Do Films about Mentally Disturbed Characters Promote Ineffective Coping in Vulnerable Youth?," *Journal of Adolescence* 29, no. 5 (2006): 749-760.

The research of Leonard Berkowitz and his colleagues in institutions for delinquent adolescent males analyzed physical and verbal aggression among the boys.⁵⁹ The participants had viewed screened violence for several weeks. The researchers compared the participants' levels of aggression with those of other adolescent males who did not view the screened violence. The research revealed that the youth who viewed the screened violence were more likely to display aggressive behavior. In terms of the validity of Berkowitz' research, the findings pertain to a laboratory setting of institutions for delinquent adolescents. However, other researchers have similarly concluded that exposure to screened violence causes increased aggression. Such research supports my project of understanding the connection between screened violence and aggression, and in turn helping youth to view violent films with a critical eye.

The work of Michael Rich includes helping young people to maintain health and offers anticipatory guidance about the risks of media violence. He notes that violence is the most prevalent risk among children and adolescents. According to Rich, research has shown that the greatest factor contributing to violent behavior is previous exposure to violence. Violence portrayed as a hero's means of dealing with conflicts and portrayed without realistic pain is the most likely to be mimicked. According to his research, more than eighty percent of the violence portrayed in music videos was used by attractive protagonists against a disproportionate number of women and African Americans.

Rich notes that young people learn by observing and imitating. Thus they are impacted by the media. Their viewing of violent images leads to their increased acceptance of violence for dealing with conflicts. Such images exaggerate the prevalence

⁵⁹ See Jacques-Philippe Leyens, Ross D. Parke, Leoncio Camino, and Leonard Berkowitz, "Effects of Movie Violence on Aggression in a Field Setting as a Function of Group Dominance and Cohesion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 346-360.

of violence in society. This provides the motivation to seek protection through owning a weapon and being aggressive. Moreover, Rich argues that violent images desensitize individuals to violence in life and the degree of harm it causes. In our current age of information, the media serves as a highly influential peer. Having increasing time to impact the attitudes and actions of young people, movies and television have replaced families and schools as educators, roles models, and sources of information about society and how young people navigate it.

Rich's work encourages citizens to protect young people from the influence of the media through media education. He advocates teaching young people to understand how the media works. Such media education enables them to avoid being manipulated by its messages. Furthermore, understanding the influence of media content enables young people to choose media thoughtfully in order to avoid content, which might affect viewers negatively. According to Rich, the evidence from research on media and violence is substantial.

In terms of the validity of Rich's work today, current research evidence shows that violent images may lead to aggressive behavior, desensitization, nightmares, and fear of being harmed. Thus there exists a need to assess our exposure to violent images and to intervene with potential health risks associated with the media. The work of Rich informs the researcher's project of the need to help adolescents to reflect critically upon the films, which they view, in order to navigate them. Rich's research in such areas as the prevalence of film violence against women and African Americans and the increased aggression found in young people exposed to such films adds substantial support to further understanding the negative power of film.

The research of Daniel G. Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod⁶⁰ suggests that adolescents can become callous as a result of viewing certain types of film. Over a period of two weeks, the researchers exposed male undergraduates to five horror films depicting violence against women. After each film, emotional reactions, perceptions of violence in the films, and attitudes toward the women in the films were measured. After longer-term exposure to violent horror films, research participants began to report fewer emotionally disturbing reactions to the films. Thus the males perceived less violence in the films and evaluated the films as less degrading to women over the course of the period. At the end of the period, participants were asked to evaluate a video of a legal trial involving a rape victim. Compared with individuals who had not viewed the films, participants perceived that the victim had suffered less and reported less sympathy for her when they were asked to review the report of the trial.⁶¹ Compared with control groups, individuals who had been exposed to horror films were less sympathetic toward the rape victim and more inclined to hold her responsible. Repeated exposure to violence thus led to calloused perceptions.

In terms of the validity of the studies of Linz and his colleagues, a critical question is whether such desensitization is permanent as opposed to temporary. In other words, over time, perhaps people can become re-sensitized. Linz explored this question by changing the periods of time between exposure to filmic violence and evaluations of victims of violence. In the study, male undergraduates viewed three horror films during a

⁶⁰ Daniel G. Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod, "The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence against Women," *Journal of Communication* 34, (Summer 1984): 130-47. Cf. Daniel G. Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod, "Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Violent and Sexually Degrading Depictions of Women," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55, no. 5 (November 1988): 758-68.

⁶¹ Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod, "The Effects of Multiple Exposures," 130.

period of six days. Then they were asked after three, five, or seven days to view a documentary film about domestic abuse. The study revealed that three days after viewing the film, the students revealed less sympathy for real victims of violence and described their injuries as less severe than a control group, which was not exposed to the horror films. Yet five as well as seven days after the viewing, the sympathy expressed by those who had seen the horror films raised to the level of the control group. Thus the effect of desensitization decreased after three days. Another critical question is whether young people outside of control groups actually spend more than three days away from images of violence. In view of our media-saturated environment, young people view images of aggression continuously. Thus there exist numerous opportunities for desensitization to take place and hardly any for re-sensitization. Linz' studies enable us to better understand how young people are desensitized from violent images in films, such as *Casino Royale*. The popularity of such films also reveals our society's increasing acceptance of violent images. Developing an understanding of desensitization is necessary for helping adolescents to reflect critically upon violent films and to respond to our hurting world with compassion.

The research of Neil M. Malamuth and James V. Check⁶² reveals that certain sexual messages may be more influential for females, while males may be influenced by other types of sexual content. The researchers conducted an experiment in which they assigned participants to conditions in a naturalistic setting. Their study used R-rated feature films. It tested the effects of various messages contained within sexual content. For example, sexual aggression against women in the films was depicted with positive

⁶² Neil M. Malamuth and James V. Check, "The Effects of Mass-media Exposure on Acceptance of Violence against Women: A Field Experiment," *Journal of Research in Personality* 15 (1981): 436-46.

consequences. Male and female undergraduate students were randomly assigned to one of two exposure conditions. Participants in the experimental condition were given tickets to view feature films on two different evenings that included portrayals of women as victims of sexual aggression, suggesting that the aggression was justified and had positive consequences. For example, the women in the films may have been sexually aroused as a result of the sexual aggression. On the same evenings, participants in the control condition were given tickets to view other films, which did not contain sexual aggression. Participants viewed these films with other audience members who purchased tickets and were not part of the research. Another group of the recruited participants who did not see the films were also examined as an untreated control group.

Several days after the films were viewed, a sexual attitude survey was administered to the class. Participants were not aware of the relationship between this survey, which was supposedly administered by a polling agency, and the earlier films, which some students had seen as part of an unrelated study. Responses were assessed by scales among irrelevant items in order to disguise the purpose of the survey. Exposure to the films portraying positive effects increased the scores of male participants but not female participants on measures assessing acceptance of the use of aggression against woman in sexual and nonsexual interactions.

In terms of the validity of the studies of Malamuth and Check today, subsequent researchers have successfully replicated their studies and arrived at the same conclusions. While the subsequent research took place among different students, films, settings, and measures, they conclude that watching films of sexual aggression against women increased the students' acceptance of filmic messages of women deserving or actually

desiring rape. The studies of Malamuth and Check inform my research with regard to how sexual content in films impacts the views of young people on sexual behavior.

Dolf Zillmann has analyzed the influence of sexual content upon the development of attitudes. Zillmann found that when college students viewed sexually explicit films, they displayed a greater acceptance of sexual infidelity and promiscuity than did control groups.⁶³ Furthermore, participants college students exposed to X-rated videos during a timeframe of six weeks indicated less satisfaction with their intimate partners. Zillmann's findings pertain to college students; However, younger adolescents have reported engaging in sexual intercourse, and they also view filmic images of sexual content. Zillmann's work buttresses my own for its validation of the connection between screened sexual content and the development of attitudes toward sex. Another aspect of my project, therefore, is to teach adolescents to critically evaluate the degree to which we should glamorize sexual intimacy between individuals who are not committed to one another.

The research of James D. Sargent and his colleagues reveals that the viewing of smoking in films leads to the initiation of smoking among adolescents. According to Sargent, viewing smoking in films influences adolescents more than does observing their own parents smoking. Indeed, watching smoking in films is the leading factor causing the initiation of smoking among adolescents.⁶⁴ Sergeant's research among adolescents in

⁶³ See Dolf Zillmann, "Erotica and Family Values," in *Media, Children, and the Family: Social Scientific, Psychodynamic, and Clinical Perspectives*, eds. Zillmann, Jennings Bryant, and Huston (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), 199-213.

⁶⁴ See James D. Sargent, Anna M. Adachi-Mejia, Jennifer J. Gibson, Linda T. Titus-Ernstoff, Charles P. Carusi, et al., "Exposure to Movie Smoking: Its Relation to Smoking Initiation among US Adolescents," *Pediatrics* 116 (2005): 1183-1191. Cf. James D. Sargent, Mike Stoolmiller, Keilah A. Worth, Sonya D. Cin, Thomas A. Willis, and Frederick X. Gibbons, et al., "Exposure to Smoking Depictions in Movies: Its Association with Established Adolescent Smoking," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 161, no. 9 (September 2007): 849-856.

New England reveals that viewing smoking in films increases the adolescents' view of smoking and the perception that most adults smoke.⁶⁵ Sargent surveyed 6,522 youth in America between the ages of 10 and 14 years. His research reveals that adolescents who viewed the most smoking scenes in films were 2.6 times more likely to start smoking. In terms of the validity of Sargent's studies, subsequent research reveals the same findings among other adolescents.⁶⁶ Sargent's studies strengthen my project by establishing the degree to which films lead young people to begin smoking.

The research involving 3,500 adolescents of Madeline A. Dalton and her colleagues revealed that the viewing of smoking in R-rated films doubled the risk of the initiation of smoking among adolescents.⁶⁷ Early adolescents of parents who forbid them from viewing R-rated films are less likely to start smoking.⁶⁸ In terms of the validity of Dalton's studies, subsequent research reveals the same finding among other adolescents.⁶⁹ Dalton's studies documents the risk that observing smoking in films can lead young people to begin smoking. This is a significant problem, for smoking portrayed in films causes the initiation of smoking among 390,000 youth each year.⁷⁰ It is thus

⁶⁵ See James D. Sargent, Jennifer J. Tickle, Michael L. Beach, M. Bridget Ahrens, and Todd F. Heatherton, "Brand Appearances in Contemporary Cinema Films and Contribution to Global Marketing of Cigarettes," *The Lancet* 357 (January 2001): 29-32. Cf. James D. Sargent, Madeline A. Dalton, Michael L. Beach, Jennifer J. Tickle, M. Bridget Ahrens, et al., "Viewing Tobacco Use in Movies: Does It Shape Attitudes that Mediate Adolescent Smoking?," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22, No. 3 (2002): 137-145.

⁶⁶ See Reiner Hanewinkel and James D. Sargent, "Exposure to Smoking in Popular Contemporary Movies and Youth Smoking in Germany," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 32 (2007): 466-473.

⁶⁷ See Madeline A. Dalton, M. Bridget Ahrens, James D. Sargent, Leila A. Mott, Michael L. Beach, Jennifer J. Tickle, et al., "Relation between Parental Restrictions on Movies and Adolescent Use of Tobacco and Alcohol," *Effective Clinical Practice* 1 (January/February 2002): 1.

⁶⁸ Madeline A. Dalton, Anna M. Adachi-Mejia, Meghan R. Longacre, Linda T. Titus-Ernstoff, Jennifer J. Gibson, Susan K. Martin, et al., "Parental Rules and Monitoring of Children's Movie-Viewing Associated with Children's Risk for Smoking and Drinking," *Pediatrics* 118 (2006): 1932-1942.

⁶⁹ See Ellen M. Thompson and Albert C. Gunther, "Cigarettes and Cinema: Does Parental Restriction of R-rated Movie Viewing Reduce Adolescent Smoking Susceptibility?," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 40 (2007): 181.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

imperative that we intervene to help adolescents to reflect critically upon the presence of smoking or other imagery in films.

Marketing

Because adolescents are consuming films, Hollywood markets to youth. Film studios observed the potential of marketing among youth in 1977 and recognized the large profit potential among adolescents. While *Star Wars* cost \$13 million to create, it earned \$35,906,661 just during its opening weekend. The latest film version of *Titanic*, starring two young adult actors, reaped an enormous sum by adolescents in the United States who viewed it in theaters multiple times. It cost \$200 million to create and has earned over \$600,779,824. The most popular recent films among adolescents include the following: *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*,⁷¹ which cost \$94 million to create and has earned over \$377,027,325. *Casino Royale*⁷² cost \$150 to create and has earned over \$167,007,184. *She's the Man*,⁷³ which cost \$20 million to create, has earned over \$33,687,630. *Blades of Glory*⁷⁴ cost \$61 million to create and has earned over \$118,153,533. *Red Eye*,⁷⁵ which cost \$25 million to create, has earned over \$57,859,105. And *Disturbia*⁷⁶ cost \$20 million to create and has earned over \$80,050,171.

⁷¹ Internet Movie Database, "Choice Movie—Action Adventure," Awards for *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2004>.

⁷² Internet Movie Database, "Choice Movie—Action Adventure," Awards for *Casino Royale*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0381061/awards>.

⁷³ Internet Movie Database, "Movies—Choice Comedy," Awards for *She's the Man*, <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2006>.

⁷⁴ Internet Movie Database, "Movies—Choice Comedy," Awards for *Blades of Glory*, <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2007>.

⁷⁵ Internet Movie Database, "Movies—Choice Thriller," Awards for *Red Eye*, <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2006>.

⁷⁶ Internet Movie Database, "Choice Movie: Horror/Thriller," Awards for *Disturbia*, <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2007>.

Marketers target adolescents. They understand that most youth view films within the first two weeks of opening.⁷⁷ A typical opening weekend will find 27% of youth among their audience members. Over the next two weeks, their attendance will increase by 44%. While 70% of adolescents indicate that their desire to view a film in a theater increases when they hear other individuals conversing on it, 68% are influenced by trailers, 65% by ads, and 48% by reviews. Furthermore, 46% indicate getting information from in-theater trailers. Also, 15% get information from entertainment websites, 15% from social networking sites, 13% from video sharing sites, and 8% from movie ticket sales.⁷⁸

Adolescents are watching at home films they missed in theaters. Among youth asked how they might view specific films they did not view in the theater, 69% noted that they would rent or purchase the DVD. Pay-per-view and television were mentioned as options by 10%. Downloads were mentioned by less than 5%.

Marketers created a celebrity culture to target youth. In the past, such celebrities included Marlon Brando, who portrayed a motorcycle gang leader in *The Wild Bunch*, James Dean, who portrayed an alienated youth in *Rebel without a Cause*, and singer Elvis Presley, who took prominent roles in a variety of films. Although popular in different time periods, each actor claimed a large following among the young people of his own generations and influenced a certain lifestyle, including apparel, hairstyle, attitude, and youth culture.

⁷⁷ Gordon Paddison, "Moviegoers: 2010," Stradella Road, <http://advertising.aol.com/sites/default/files/MovieGoers2010.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Contemporary Popular Films

The most popular films among adolescents contain disturbing content.⁷⁹ In the first scene of *Casino Royale*,⁸⁰ we witness James Bond beating a man, drowning him, and shooting him. Notably, the film contains a scene in which Bond is tortured by having his genitals beaten. Another character is shot in the eye with a nail gun. In *Blades of Glory*,⁸¹ an actress, Katie, is shown wearing lingerie, while a main character, Chazz Michaelson, places his hands on her breasts. In another scene, a coach screens a video in which a skater decapitates another skater. In terms of language, the film contains various terms for sex, references to male genitals, references to female breasts, profanity using God's name, references to drugs, and a scene with alcohol abuse. In *Disturbia*,⁸² Kale strikes his teacher's face repeatedly after the teacher falls upon the floor. There are scenes of pornography on a television screen. In one such scene, a girl on television places her hands on her breasts repeatedly. The film has a scene in which the main actress, Ashley, undresses. Various individuals are struck. A number of deaths are shown. Ashley attempts to gouge the murderer's eyes. The murderer breaks an officer's neck. A character is stabbed with a knife and hedge trimmers. Mutilated corpses are shown. In terms of language, the main character, Kale, gestures with his middle finger. Adolescents are shown drinking. A song makes reference to drugs. When Kale's mother visits the murderer's home, the murderer grasps her before slamming her head against a wall. The murderer tapes Kale's mouth and reveals his plans about murdering Kale's mother.

⁷⁹ These films were viewed in the project.

⁸⁰ Internet Movie Database, "Choice Movie," Awards for *Casino Royale*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0381061/awards>.

⁸¹ Internet Movie Database, "Movies," Awards for *Blades of Glory* <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2007>.

⁸² Internet Movie Database, "Choice Movie," Awards for *Disturbia* <http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000644/2007>.

Socialization is a significant component of an individual's development. Drawing upon the theories of Mead, Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg, I discussed how socialization takes place. Individuals are shaped by various agents of socialization. Such agents shape the individual's attitudes. Among the different socializing agents is the media, including film. I offered evidence for the impact of films upon adolescents. I examined the evidence for the pervading nature of film among adolescents. I discussed the amount of money adolescents spend on films, how Hollywood markets to youth, the amount of money spent on merchandizing lines, and the influence of celebrities. Adolescents are prime targets. In addition to being pervasive, film shapes the behavior of adolescents. I offered evidence for the influence of film upon the behavior and attitudes of adolescents. I presented evidence for films that are popular among adolescents. As a youth ministry researcher and practitioner, I presented my critique of films popular among youth and the content that are problematic. I am concerned about such messages. I presented the various problems that call for critical consciousness, including body image, violence, racism, and consumerism. Such messages conveyed through film are problematic for a faith perspective. My aim was to engage adolescents with such messages in films popular among the youth.

Chapter 2

Literature Review on Film and Youth Ministries

Film has been utilized in youth ministries in the following five ways: 1) As entertainment, 2) As illustrations for youth program talks and sermons, 3) As youth program conversation starters, activities, and prayers, 4) To teach faith lessons and discuss faith issues, and 5) As part of programs for retreats. An examination of resources on such utilization of film in ministries among adolescents reveals a gap in the literature. While youth programs screen constructive films for spiritual edification, they often neglect to teach young people about how to reflect critically on the harmful films they may encounter, or even to ask critical questions about the films shown in youth programs. This chapter will analyze the literature and provide examples of the ways in which faith communities use the various methods.

1. Film as Entertainment

Dennis C. Benson and Bill Wolfe, authors of *The Basic Encyclopedia for Youth Ministry*, document the viewing of full-length feature films for entertainment in ministries among adolescents.¹ In some youth ministries, films have been simply shown without time for reflection. For example, some youth workers take youth to a local theater to view a film during their youth group night. This allows the adolescents to be

¹See Dennis C. Benson and Bill Wolfe, *The Basic Encyclopedia for Youth Ministry* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Books, 1981). Cf. Gary Dausey, *The Youth Leader's Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1983). He recommends that youth workers preview the films carefully for their content. Furthermore, he notes that if financial resources are a limitation, films are available for rental through public libraries. Cf. also Lawrence O. Richards, *Youth Ministry: It's Renewal in the local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985).

entertained and/or to gain some knowledge from the film. But the youth program evening might conclude without time for discussion on the film. However occasionally, though rarely, such viewings might be followed by discussions on the connections among the topic, the film, and the lives of the youth. A critique of this approach to viewing films is that the youth might be impacted by the content of the films but not have opportunities to reflect critically upon the content. Such content might stand in opposition to the values of the adolescent's family and/or faith community. Opportunities to discuss the films might enable the youth to move beyond discussions of whether they enjoyed or disliked the films to reflect critically upon their experience of the content of the films, and to understand the intersection between their lives and the lives of the characters portrayed in the films. Benson and Wolfe argue that films are a major entertainment medium of adolescents. They provide a significant contribution to the box office. Films that appeal to youth yield a substantial financial return and lead to the success of the films. Historically the Church viewed films as sinful.² While there will no doubt always be some films that communities of faith consider problematic in terms of their impact upon adolescents, film as a significant form of art has been widely accepted.

2. Film as an Illustration for Youth Program Talks and Sermons

Bryan Belknap is the Music and Media columnist for *Group* magazine and a co-host for a Christian media radio program in Los Angeles. His book, *Group's Blockbuster*

² See Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialog*, 2th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

Movie Illustrations,³ presents the utilization of film as an illustration for youth program talks and sermons.

An aim of Belknap's book is to serve as a resource for youth workers who might have a point in their talks or sermons or a specific Scripture passage that they seek to illustrate. Since the clips in his book are organized by topics, the youth workers can search among the themes listed that connect with their point or select a filmic clip using the resource's Scripture index. After selecting a clip, the youth worker can find that the illustration is divided into several aspects. In his resource, each filmic illustration begins by introducing the theme, title, and rating information of the film and includes a passage of Scripture that relates to the theme. Also, readers can observe and/or utilize the following: 1) Alternate Views. Although the discussion questions focus upon a specific theme, each of the filmic clips in this book can be utilized as catalysts for discussions on diverse topics. In the section on Alternate Views, youth workers can draw upon other themes and Scriptures to begin a discussion. 2) Overview. Here the resource presents a synopsis of the events portrayed in the filmic clip and lists the characters. In order to find more information on the plot of the film, the youth worker can examine the details included in the Movie Background Index. 3) Illustration. Here the resource presents the point of the illustration. The youth worker can search for an explanation of the spiritual significance of the filmic clip and how it relates to the lives of the adolescents. The youth worker can utilize it as a guide and, then, explain the main point in his or her youth program talk or sermon. 4) Questions. Here the resource provides discussion starters. Thus the youth worker can find questions to engage the adolescents, analyze Scripture,

³ See Bryan Belknap, *Group's Blockbuster Movie Illustrations* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 2001).

and help the youth to apply the message to their lives. As mentioned above, if the youth workers are drawing upon an Alternate View, they will need to create their own discussion questions that apply to the theme they have selected. After the youth workers have previewed the filmic clip and cued the film, they can utilize the illustration.

Example

Belknap's book presents an illustration containing the following aspects: 1) Theme. An illustration can be utilized for youth program talks or sermons on the theme of prayer. 2) Title. The illustration utilizes the filmic drama, *Amadeus*, based upon the life of the composer. 3) Scripture. The illustration is based upon the Scripture, Psalm 66:17-19, on praying while harboring sin. 4) Overview. Belknap recounts a scene in which Salieri remembers his childhood desire to become a musician of great renown. Because his father would not allow him to pursue his dream, Salieri promised God that he would glorify God with his music if he could become such a composer. According to Salieri, God answered his prayer by killing his father. 5) Illustration. Belknap invites viewers to acknowledge that all have bartered with God at some point in life, while being under the illusion of possessing so many things that God might need desperately. However according to Belknap, prayer should not be a practice utilized for negotiating a deal with God. Instead, Belknap argues, it is a means by which to become open to God's communication and direction and to give God the praise that he deserves. Thus the wish list can be left aside.

Belknap asks the following questions: 1) “Have you ever tried to make a deal with God? What happened?”⁴ 2) “How does society view prayer? According to television and movies, what purpose does prayer serve? Read Psalm 66:17-19.”⁵ 3) “What kinds of prayers does God not listen to?”⁶ 4) “Is it OK to ask God for things? Why or why not?”⁷ 5) “What changes in your attitude will erase any wickedness in your prayers?”⁸

Belknap’s approach can be helpful for using film to deepen our understanding of the biblical text and our relationship with God. Still, there are more settings than Belknap puts forth, such as youth group nights, during which ministers might utilize films and discussions thereof in order to empower adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of the content of the films. Providing space for such reflection and learning would allow youth to feel welcome to share their perspectives in greater depth and to learn how to critically engage films that they might view together as a group as well as individuals.

In *Group’s Blockbuster Movie Illustrations*, Belknap discusses the film, *Amadeus*, and argues that the film is about prayer. Indeed, the film contains prayer, and to discuss the film as such might lead to some helpful insights. Yet a critical viewing can reveal another theme, which is more central. It might not matter crucially that Mozart’s behavior might be problematic at times in the film. He can compose extraordinary music. One might not expect God to bestow such a gift upon Mozart. Yet God chooses to do so. As a result, Salieri becomes insane with jealousy. Critical reflection upon the film’s narrative

⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

brings other themes to the surface, such as jealousy and vocational calling, which can also be provocative sources of theological discussion.

In general, Belknap discusses a type of film to which adolescents are not often exposed. Such films provide constructive educational lessons for young people, but other resources should be developed that draw upon more popular films among adolescents, such as the summer box office attractions that target adolescents. An aim of my project is to nurture critical consciousness by observing films that engage adolescents that they would watch on their own time. These are the films we must teach them to reflect upon critically.

Sometimes the language of Belknap's text is theologically problematic. For example, he asks, "What changes in your attitude will erase any wickedness in your prayers?" Instead, exploring critical questions about theological insights on the Psalms might reveal how the psalmists often acknowledge their needs and desires transparently. Perhaps utilizing another word, rather than "wickedness," might convey more clearly that God seeks to listen to the authentic, soulful yearnings and prayers of adolescents.

3. Films as Youth Program Conversation Starters, Activities, and Prayers

Patrick J. Donovan is the executive director for the Office for Catholic Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware. His book, *Using the Remote to Channel Jesus: 50 Movie Clips for Ministry*,⁹ presents a utilization of film as youth program conversation starters, activities, and prayers.

⁹ See Donovan, Patrick J., *Using the Remote to Channel Jesus: 50 Movie Clips for Ministry* (Winooski, VT: St. Mary's Press, 2009).

His method is as follows: First in setting the scene, youth workers need to view a film in its entirety. Second, youth workers need to view it a second time, with different individuals, if possible. As they are watching, they should note that which the resource's suggested scene instructs. Donovan invites youth workers to watch key scenes several times in order to ensure that they have accurate timing in screening the film. Youth workers should pre-examine the session, including its questions, the activities, and the follow-up material, to ensure that they will become effective in utilizing the material. They need to ask themselves the following questions: "Can the scene speak for itself? How will I introduce it? Will my audience be moved to view the rest of the film?"¹⁰ Then they need to ask themselves: "What's next? How will I begin the conversation, prayer, or activity?"¹¹

Youth workers should practice utilizing the resource with an individual outside the youth ministry circle in order to ascertain whether he or she sees that which the youth workers see. Perhaps this individual might suggest a more effective method with which to introduce the scene. Perhaps he or she might observe something the youth workers did not see that might create a problem in utilizing the resource. According to Donovan, it is imperative that youth workers know their audience. Youth workers might not know every adolescent who braves the door of the youth ministry program; yet youth workers should know their community of adolescents adequately enough to know whether a particular filmic scene might be inappropriate for screening. For example, they should not utilize the resource's suggested scene from the film, *Raising Helen*, with a youth group program

¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹¹ Ibid.

that includes an adolescent who recently lost a parent, unless the youth workers are well prepared.

Donovan reminds us that being well prepared to lead a youth ministry program communicates respect for the adolescents. His resource encourages youth workers to view the films and read the sessions in their entirety prior to utilizing the scenes and/or the sessions. Yet he offers no script for youth workers to follow in setting the scene for the adolescents. Instead, Donovan maintains that youth ministers viewing the film on their own or with friends will enable them to set the scene in their own words. To illustrate the value of thoughtful pre-screening, Donovan recalls a parent who had seen *Finding Nemo* only recalling that she enjoyed the film. She forgot that it begins with Nemo's mother being attacked by a predator. Thus she needed to turn off the film quickly when her children became frightened. To illustrate his point further, he recalls the experience of another friend who accompanied her early adolescents to view *Titanic*, not having an awareness of the content of the film, and assumed that it was merely a documentary about the sinking of the ship. To her dismay, in her view, the film included a dysfunctional relationship, nudity, and a sex scene. Thus Donovan asserts the value of preparing well for showing films to adolescents.

Donovan developed his method in order to ensure that the youth ministry program operates well. After setting the scene with the adolescents, youth workers can screen the film and, then, facilitate a discussion about the scene that they have utilized. He encourages youth workers not to fear silence, particularly while discussing powerful clips. He suggests allowing a time for silence for a period of one minute in order to allow

the adolescents to have an opportunity to reflect upon a film's meaning. Then youth workers can ask questions from his resource.

After asking the discussion questions, which might include an activity, youth workers might consider utilizing the additional questions offered, if time permits. If they lead two groups of adolescents, a junior high and a senior high group, for example, they can utilize one variation with one group and the additional questions with the other.

Example

Donovan presents a conversation starter utilizing the film, *A Man for All Seasons*. His method includes the following: 1) Set the scene. Donovan explains that the film is based upon Robert Bolt's play of the same name. The film portrays the narrative of Saint Thomas More's refusal to accept King Henry VIII as the head of the Church in England. According to Donovan, this film is about moral decision making. Faced with the possibility of being executed, Sir Thomas becomes imprisoned willingly rather than acting against his convictions. Although each of his friends and colleagues has signed the Oath of Supremacy, he does not do so. He also refuses to explain why he will not sign the oath. When Sir Thomas is questioned again, he attempts to explain his silence to the Duke of Norfolk, who was once a close friend and advocate. 2) Utilize the following suggested process: a) Show the clip. b) Ask the following discussion questions: i) "Sir Thomas and the Duke of Norfolk were once close friends. Now the Duke has signed the oath, and Sir Thomas has been incarcerated. Do you think that the Duke feels bad for his friend? Does he show it?"¹² ii) "At this point, Sir Thomas has been in prison in the Tower of London for years. Wouldn't it have been easier for him to just sign the oath and, then,

¹² Ibid., 15.

be released from prison? Why do you think he refuses?”¹³ iii) “Have you ever believed in something so strongly that you were willing to stand alone to remain faithful to your beliefs? Have you ever known anyone else who was willing to do this?”¹⁴ iv) “What do you think about Sir Thomas’ response to the Duke about coming to hell ‘for fellowship’? How would you use such a line in your own situations at school, home, or work?”¹⁵ v) “In another scene, Sir Thomas’ wife becomes angry because he will not reveal his reasons for refusing to sign the oath. Instead he tells her: ‘In my silence is my safety, and my silence must be absolute.’ Why is silence often a good idea when it comes to having something to say about what other people are doing? When is silence not a good idea?”¹⁶ Donovan’s lesson continues with suggestions such as having youth research the life of Sir Thomas More and using the film as a springboard for discussing peer pressure, for which he includes helpful starter questions that connect the challenges in their lives with those of More.

Here, Donovan offers a lesson on a drama to which adolescents are not commonly exposed. Like Belknap, Donovan presents a thoughtful and enriching lessons based on wonderful films. Nevertheless, his focus on somewhat older films reminds us that there is still a need for youth ministry programs that draw upon contemporary popular films that and influence target adolescents. Developing a program that incorporates not only classic films such as *A Man for All Seasons*, but also current, popular, and socially challenging films will enable youth workers to more fully access the lived contexts of adolescents and their communities.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

4. Films Utilized to Teach Faith Lessons and Discuss Faith Issues

Doug Fields is a youth ministry program teacher and small group leader at Saddleback Church, in Lake Forest, CA. He is the author of other youth ministry books, including *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, and he is a speaker at Youth Specialties events. Eddie James is a member of his drama team, The Skit Guys, and a creative arts minister at The Heights Baptist Church, in Richardson, Texas.

Fields and James' book, *Videos that Teach*,¹⁷ can be utilized by youth workers to teach faith lessons and discuss faith issues.¹⁸ For example, youth workers might seek to engage youth more creatively, utilizing a film-based lesson for youth ministry programs. Youth workers can utilize the resource's list of films to select a film relevant to a particular lesson. Each of the filmic clips in Fields and James' resource contains various elements that youth workers can utilize for their lessons. For example, they can use a clip to illustrate their own lesson, or they can develop a scripture study in its entirety utilizing the clip and the scripture references provided, in conjunction with the youth workers' preliminary study. Also, youth workers can utilize any of the several questions for each clip as a catalyst to engage youth at the start of small-group discussions. Knowing the adolescents, youth workers can adapt the resource according to their pedagogical needs.

Fields and James' book offers youth workers a list of various film clips, each of which includes several other elements: 1) Trailer. This is the leading question that youth

¹⁷ Doug Fields and Eddie James, *Videos that Teach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999).

¹⁸ Youth workers can search the book by film, topic, or Scripture to illustrate faith lessons and/or discussions on faith issues.

workers can utilize to engage adolescents and introduce the lesson topic.¹⁹ This leading question offers contextual cues to look and listen for in the clip. For example, Fields and James state that simply screening the clip of a comedy might draw laughter among the youth at an outcome of a particular conflict without reflecting upon the source of the conflict. On the other hand, if the youth workers introduce their lesson with an engaging question on the film's background, the adolescents might still laugh in response to the clip. Yet they can also understand the point in the lesson. In terms of timing, depending upon the nature of the youth group, this introductory question might be a catalyst for a fifteen to twenty minute discussion before showing the clip. 2) The film. For youth workers not familiar with a film, the resource presents a brief synopsis. Youth workers familiar with the film can utilize and/or read the synopsis to provide a background of the film before showing the clip. 3) The Film Clip. The resource presents a detailed description of the clip itself. 4) Scripture. Here youth workers can find scripture passages that are relevant to the clip's topic. This can be utilized in order to create and develop a lesson, explore biblical insights, or engage questions for small-group discussions. 5) Where to Apply the Lesson. Here the resource provides several discussion questions that attempt to weave the central point of the clip with the biblical passages listed earlier. Youth workers are encouraged to allow the questions to guide them. Thus youth workers can edit the questions to align them with the direction of the lesson or the depth of discussion among the youth. This is the time for adolescents to explore the meanings behind the clip, how scripture addresses the particular situation, and how it applies to their lives.

¹⁹ These leading questions are listed for each filmic clip.

Example: *Amistad*

1) Trailer. The resource explores whether the hope of Christ is adequate enough to help individuals endure any challenge. 2) The Film. The resource recounts how in 1839, *La Amistad*, a Spanish slave ship, set sail for the United States. The slaves on the ship rebelled against their captors. This film follows the trial of Cinque, the slave who led the revolt. 3) The Film Clip. The resource recounts how an imprisoned slave is given a Bible containing pictures of the life of Christ. By examining them, he begins to see that Christ transformed everything. He pieces together the narrative of Christ, sharing what he understands with another slave. Thus both are able to find hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. 4) Scripture. The resource lists the following scripture passages: Romans 12:12, 15:4; 1 Corinthians 15:19; and 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10. 5) Where to Apply the Lesson. The resource raises the following discussion questions: a) “If you were one of the prisoners, would you have had hope after learning the message of Jesus?”²⁰ b) “What more could the church have done for the slave than just give him a Bible? What can you do to help people understand more about Jesus and his message of salvation?”²¹ c) “Does the slave believe God will break the chains that bind him? Does he believe he will be cleared of all charges? What is the specific hope he has?”²² d) “What are some hopes you have? What are the hopes you can have when you know Christ?”²³ e) “Have you ever completely given up hope? Were you able to find it again? How?”²⁴ f) “How does hope

²⁰ See Fields and James, *Videos that Teach*, 25.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

help us get through difficult times?”²⁵ g) “The Bible is a powerful book with a message of hope. What other books have given you hope?”²⁶

A strength of the resource’s screenings of films is that it engages theological issues through the narratives of inspirational films and encourages time for providing background information and discussion at the end of the screening. The youth worker might draw upon the film-based lessons so that youth can learn from the positive values portrayed in the films. A weakness of simply screening such films is that they are dramas that adolescents might not typically view.²⁷ Furthermore, Fields and James argue that *Amistad* is about hope. Indeed, the film portrays this narrative of hope. Yet this is a one theme among several.²⁸ Critical reflection upon the film might reveal another focus. Through the scenes, the filmmaker has explored the challenge of resisting corporate evil. Focusing upon holding onto hope to endure suffering, the youth worker needs to communicate clearly to prevent placing the adolescent at risk of domestication and enduring evils, including contexts of abuse.

Despite the limitations of Fields and James’ work, the screening of such theologically provocative films can be a valuable resource for youth workers to draw upon in their teachings and discussions as they nurture intentional reflection upon empowering narratives. They can present opportunities to share transformative narratives and encourage adolescents to live out the narratives in their communities.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Notably, having youth view powerful films they might not normally see can be a strength. It broadens their horizons. A lesson such as the one on *Amistad* might be most beneficial if in addition to discussing the theological issues presented in the lesson, the discussion is expanded to include contemporary films that the youth have seen.

²⁸ There are several themes, and that it is important to explore various themes for the reason stated above (not neglecting issues that could be of concern to at risk youth). Asking adolescents what themes they found in the movie would of course enrich such a discussion as well.

5. Films as Programs for Retreats

Samuel F. Parvin is the senior past of Tuskawilla United Methodist Church in Casselberry, Florida. His book, *Weekend at the Movies*,²⁹ presents a utilization of films for programs at retreats. Parvin acknowledges that adolescents are paying attention to and enjoying films. He argues that their passion for films presents an opportunity to relate the life, lesson, and good news of Christ in a current, meaningful, and engaging way. According to Parvin, Christians passionate about films have always enjoyed analyzing and discussing religious themes on film, and a number of filmmakers are passionate about incorporating such images and themes. Thus an aim of *Weekend at the Movies* is to present a helpful resource to youth ministries to engage with films. Parvin argues that the films is about grace. While there exists grace in this film when the protagonist is allowed to awaken from a curse by true love's kiss, I maintain that other perspectives, such as Turpin's, should be incorporated as well. While this is a constructive, thoughtful, and interesting lesson for on *Sleeping Beauty*, there is still a need for film lessons that empower youth to be agents to reflect critically. Critical reflection upon the film's narrative surfaces other themes, such as the empowerment of females, which might also present a thought-provoking resource for theological discussion. Such an issue might be applicable to youth who might be influenced to simply wait passively for a heroic male to rescue her from oppressive contexts.

In terms of method, Parvin presents the following suggestions for incorporating the faith images of film into the lives of adolescents: 1) "Youth workers should always

²⁹ Samuel F. Parvin, *Weekend at the Movies: 14 Blockbuster Retreats for Youth* (Abingdon Press, 1999).

preview the film in its entirety before screening it at retreats.”³⁰ 2) “Youth workers should always get parental consent before screening films with questionable content.”³¹ 3) “Likewise, youth workers should keep parents and legal guardians well informed of retreat programs at all times.”³² 4) “Youth workers should not infringe upon the Federal Copyright Act.”³³ 5) “Youth workers should remember, and remind skeptics in their congregations, that a film does not necessarily need to be a religious film to contain faith messages and themes. Likewise, not all religious films offer faith messages and themes for adolescents.”³⁴ 6) “Youth workers should not assume that printed answers to the discussion questions are set in stone. Sometimes there are no right or wrong answers;”³⁵ his resource seeks to offer helpful responses for clarity. 7) “Youth workers should customize the discussion questions and activities to suit the contexts of their youth.”³⁶ 8) “Youth workers should utilize the film viewing information to enable them to move quickly to the filmic clips.”³⁷

Example:

Parvin’s resource presents a film and sleepover retreat for mothers and daughters based upon the following scriptures: Ruth 1:1-5 and Luke 1:26-34. The retreat focuses upon graceful relationships. This lesson includes the following: 1) Theme. “Because life does not always turn out the way in which one plans it, one can best achieve happiness by

³⁰ Ibid., 27.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

seeing the grace in any situation and by living one's life as a reflection of that grace."³⁸ 2)

Purpose. "The purpose of this retreat is to increase mother-daughter communication about relationship issues."³⁹ 3) Materials. "This retreat requires a video of Disney's

Sleeping Beauty, a television set, and a DVD player."⁴⁰ 4) Background. The resource notes that the film was created in 1959, is 75 minutes in duration, and is rated G. 5)

Cautions. The resource argues that most audiences will find no objectionable material in the film. 6) Synopsis. "When Princess Aurora is born, the entire kingdom celebrates,

except for the antagonist, who did not receive an invitation and, in vengeance, places a sleeping spell upon the princess and her kingdom."⁴¹ 7) Learning about relationships.

"Working in separate groups, the mothers can brainstorm and create a list entitled, 'Ten Things You Need to Know to Be a Good Daughter.' The daughters can create a list of

'Ten Things You Need to Know to Be a Good Mother.' After each list is recorded on poster paper and posted, each group will defend its position. Then each group must

remove one item from the other's list, while adding an item of their own. This exercise is intended communicate some basic truths about mother-daughter relationships."⁴² 8)

Introduce the film. "Youth workers can introduce the film by telling the group that the character, Aurora, had four mothers—her biological mother and three good fairies. Then they can tell the group that like the stories of the featured scriptures, this narrative is also full of unexpected circumstances and grace-filled relationships. In light of the wish each good fairy bestowed on Aurora, youth leaders can ask: 'If you could grant just one wish

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

for your daughter or your mother, what would it be?”⁴³ 9) One wish. “After screening the film, youth workers can offer each mother-daughter team some free time during which to walk together, and tell each other their one wish. When they return, the youth workers can invite volunteers to tell the group about their wishes.”⁴⁴ 10) Conclusion. “Youth workers can lead a discussion on the concept of grace found in the scriptures and the film and how they relate to the lives of the mothers and daughters.”⁴⁵ 11) Closing prayer. “Youth workers can close the retreat with a prayer centered around grace.”⁴⁶

Parvin’s resource discusses the film, *Sleeping Beauty*, and argues that the film is about grace. The film portrays this narrative of grace. Yet this is a one theme among several.⁴⁷ Critical reflection upon the film might reveal another focus. Through the scenes, the filmmaker portrays a helpless comatose female who must rely upon a male hero to save her and her kingdom. With the film’s focus upon waiting for some day when a prince will come, the youth worker can present alternative narratives to communicate clearly the empowerment of females to prevent placing adolescent females at risk of domestication and enduring evils until an empowered male rescues her. According to Katherine Turpin, princess narratives can socialize young people in problematic ways, influencing the identity development and social commitments of girls as well as their understandings of self in terms of gender, racial, and class positions. As in other princess films, the hero is an Anglo male of royal descent. Reflecting critically upon the narrative

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ There are several themes, and that it is important to explore various themes for the reason stated above (not neglecting issues that could be of concern to at risk youth). Asking adolescents what themes they found in the movie would of course enrich such a discussion as well.

can surface the troubling themes of such films and invite reflection upon their ideological assumptions.

In sum, the aforementioned uses of film reveal a domestication of adolescents by youth ministries and publishers. Parvin offers constructive lessons, but there is still a need for film lessons that empower youth to be agents to reflect critically. These uses do not address the powerful influence of film upon the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents or upon their perceptions of reality. The youth ministry books with study questions on film clips and scripture provide notes from the authors on what theological concepts the students might draw from the films. They also allow youth to reflect critically upon their own experience of the content of the films.

There nevertheless exists a gap in youth ministry resources that analyze the experience of adolescents who view films. The youth ministry books contain study questions on film clips and scripture to teach a theological concept illustrated in the film. However, they are not always connected with studies on the experiences of youth viewing film. There exists a need for further research on how films influence adolescents' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of reality. Youth need to be empowered to critically engage with their experience of the films from within the ministries. While pedagogies of empowerment among adolescents have been developed by Frank Rogers, Jr. and David White, they have not been applied to youth ministries through films, which adolescents view. This dissertation seeks to fulfill the need for such a pedagogy of empowerment.

Chapter 3

The Theological Significance of Narrative

Narrative theology emerged in order to deal with the challenges presented by the Enlightenment's emphasis upon reason and individuality in matters of faith. Christian scholars who would uphold the utilization of narrative did not view such reason as the correct description of life. Rather, such scholars viewed life as grounded upon a community that had a narrative, which includes its past and future. Thus a person's identity is defined in relation to the community. Furthermore, reasonableness is determined within the boundaries of the community's narrative.

H. Richard Niebuhr

H. Richard Niebuhr was a formative figure in the history of narrative theology. He raised several significant theological questions about the relations of the relative and the absolute in history, about the connections between "scientific" or objective and religious history, and about the perennial problem of natural religion and historical faith.¹ According to Niebuhr, consciousness is conditioned by history. It must begin with Christian history, and the beginning of that history is in revelation. It cannot have any other starting point. Theology can stand in the independent reality of that which is disclosed. And the theologian needs to recognize that individuals cannot understand what others are trying to communicate unless they occupy the same standpoint.²

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1941), vii.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

According to Niebuhr, the believer's community spoke in confessional terms about the events that had happened to it in its history and accepted an historical point of view.³ Thus ministers did not deliver sermons drawing upon an argument for the existence of God nor an admonition to follow the dictates of some common human conscience, unhistorical and super-social in character.⁴ Instead, they spoke of history, of what happened to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of a deliverance from Egypt, of the covenant of Sinai, and of mighty acts of God.⁵ It was a simple recital of the great events connected with the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and a confession of what had happened to the community of disciples.⁶ The preaching of narratives of was more than a need for vivid illustration or for analogical reasoning. Their narrative was not a parable which could be replaced by another. It was irreplaceable and untranslatable.⁷

Niebuhr makes a distinction between external and internal history. The data of external history are impersonal. They are ideas, interests, and movements, among things. When such history deals with individuals, it seeks to reduce them to impersonal parts. For example from this point of view, Jesus becomes a complex of ideas about ethics and eschatology, and of psychological and biological elements. Other individuals are dealt within a similar manner.⁸ In external history, all apprehension and interpretation of events must utilize the category of individuality.⁹ For external history, we seek to set forth the

³ Ibid., 43.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹ Ibid., 65.

primary characteristics of each event as these may be defined by taking into account the reports of eye-witnesses.¹⁰

For Niebuhr, internal history is personal.¹¹ In internal history, our concern is with subjects. In internal history, the category of personality must be utilized in perceiving and understanding that which happens.¹² In our history all events occur not to impersonal bodies but to selves in community with other selves and they must be so understood.¹³ In internal history, we are concerned with values.¹⁴ These are common and verifiable in a community of selves; yet they are not objective in the sense in which the primary qualities of external perception are said to be objective.¹⁵ There is a descriptive and a normative knowledge of history and neither type is reducible to the terms of the other.¹⁶

Internal history refers to communal events, remembered by a community and in a community.¹⁷ Such history can only be confessed by the community.¹⁸ One must look with them and not at them to verify their visions, participate in their history rather than regard it if one would understand what they understood.¹⁹ The history of the inner life can only be confessed by selves who speak of what happened to them in the community of other selves.²⁰

¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹¹ Ibid., 64.

¹² Ibid., 65.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 67.

¹⁷ Ibid., 72.

¹⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Stephen Crites

Stephen Crites is a formative figure in the history of narrative theology. He argues that our historical crisis is that of temporality. In other words, one experiences time as abstract or immediate. According to Crites, experience has a narrative quality. Furthermore, action is revealed and completed as a whole in a story. Crites argues that the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative.²¹ Furthermore, narrative makes things intelligible over time. He argues that narrative is a cultural universal.

Crites address the question of whether narrative is utilized to organize a life of experience that is lacking order.²² According to Crites, life is an incipient narrative.²³ Notably, he makes the distinction between sacred and mundane stories.²⁴ A sacred story is a core story around which all other stories revolve. Other stories are told in light of it. According to Crites, we might call sacred stories “religious,” except that this designation implies modern distinctions between religious forms and secular, and these distinctions are misleading as applied to traditional cultures.²⁵ Yet they are the core stories that all cultures live out. A sacred story is a standard by which other stories are judged. According to Crites, it guides all experience. Such narratives define mundane stories.

Crites also addresses the inner form of experience.²⁶ He argues that between the sacred story and the mundane stories, there is a mediating form: the form of the

²¹ Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Why Narrative*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 66.

²² *Ibid.*, 69.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

experiencing consciousness itself.²⁷ Such consciousness is shaped by the sacred story to which it awakens, and in turn it finds expression in the mundane stories that articulate its sense of reality.”²⁸ Furthermore according to Crites, consciousness grasps its objects in an inherently temporal way, and that temporality is retained in the unity of its experience as a whole.²⁹ Notably, he argues that memory is the key, which allows one to experience life. Moreover without memory, experience would have no coherence.³⁰ Consciousness would be confined to a bare, momentary present, i.e., in a disconnected succession of perceptions which it would have no power to relate to one another.³¹ According to Crites, memories allow individuals to reinterpret their past mundane narratives. Memories allow individuals to place such narratives together in new ways, which allow the creativity and development of future mundane narratives as well as sacred stories. According to Crites, the unity of an individual’s past, present, and future requires narrative forms for its expression through mundane stories and for its own sense of the meaning of its internal coherence through sacred stories.³²

Crites argues that sacred and mundane stories, as well as the temporal form of experience, make up the narrative quality of experience. When these reinforce each other, individuals have symbolic moments in which their lives are illuminated. However, a narrative only acknowledges and informs that which is contained in its ordering of events. Yet if a sacred story or core narrative no longer illuminates one’s life, one can consciously change the narratives by which one lives. Notably, a conversion that

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 77.

transforms consciousness requires a traumatic change in an individual's story.³³ Thus a conversion retells an individual's past, present, and future.³⁴ Also according to Crites, the narrative form of experience allows some forms of expression, which are narratives. Yet such forms are abstracted from narratives.

Stanley Hauerwas

Hauerwas emphasized the distinct identity of the Christian community. He argued that an individual acts as the kind of character he or she is. Thus it is important to shape the character with virtues and moral convictions. Also, it is important that the church develop the virtues and moral convictions appropriate to its character and become what it should be. This is the grounds for any witness in the world. Here the church can only act as the kind of community it is. It is crucial that it become a community of character appropriate to its narrative. Thus the Christian's most important social task is to be a community capable of hearing the story of God we find in the scripture and to live in a manner that is faithful to that story.³⁵ The first task of Christian ethics is not to make the world better or more just but to help Christians form their community consistent with their conviction that the story of Christ is a truthful account of our existence.³⁶

The foundational narrative for Christianity is the story of the cross and resurrection of Christ. Christians need to have substantive and profound convictions about Jesus and live according to them. The truth of Jesus is inseparable from his social significance for us. It creates and is known by the kind of community his story should

³³ Ibid., 83.

³⁴ Ibid., 84.

³⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2.

³⁶ Ibid., 11.

form. Thus Christology, which is not a social ethic, is deficient.³⁷ Even Christ's role as savior of all humanity must be witnessed in a manner that makes clear that the universal can be claimed only through learning the particular form of discipleship required by this particular individual.³⁸ The story of Jesus is inseparable from how that story teaches us to follow him. We understand the Kingdom of God from the story of Jesus that defines the nature of God's reign and offers new possibilities of being human. His cross and resurrection are the final words about the Kingdom. Here the church is the organized form of Jesus' story.³⁹ This means that the church is a remembering community that keeps Jesus' story alive and tries to form its identity as well as the character of its members through that memory. This reveals the importance of Christology and the authority of scripture as the formative sources of the Christian community. Christian ethics is inseparable from the theology that informs its narrative.⁴⁰ Hauerwas establishes the relation between narrative and ethics. Hauerwas argues that the moral life is not merely a matter of decision governed by principles and rules; we can only act in the world we see in a seeing partially determined by the kind of beings we have become through the narratives we have learned and embodied in our life.⁴¹ The stories we live by are the basic moral units of our character. Stories are not just tales but claims about the truth of existence, about what kind of people we should be.⁴²

Hauerwas views the construction of the self as narrative in structure. Thus, identity is narrative in structure, and such an individual can act in the world as he or she

³⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁸ Ibid., 41.

³⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

⁴² Ibid., 57.

sees. This seeing is determined by the being the individual has become through the narratives he or she has learned and embodied in life.⁴³ Hauerwas reveals that our character is the result of our attention to the world that gives a coherence to our intentionality.⁴⁴ Such attention is given form and content by the narratives through which we have learned to form the narrative of our lives.⁴⁵ To be a moral person is to allow narratives to be told through us so that our activities gain a coherence that allows us to claim them for ourselves.⁴⁶ Here the importance of narratives is the importance of character for the moral life as our experience itself is but an incipient narrative.⁴⁷ Thus narrative forms one's vision. According to Hauerwas, narratives suggest how we should see and describe our selves, others, and the world in ways that rules do not.⁴⁸ Hauerwas reveals that narratives provide the narrative accounts that give our lives coherence.⁴⁹ The narratives one lives by are the moral units of an individual's character. Narratives involve a claim about how our lives must be centered to correspond to the truth of human existence.⁵⁰ The narratives we utilize to organize our lives are inherited from our culture and particular biographical situation.⁵¹ Our character, developed through virtues, is more important than our isolated actions. Ethics must assume this historical background to make sense of morality. For narrative theology, the Christian faith is mediated through the story of a community and its faith in Jesus. The Christian story is demonstrated by its

⁴³ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁵¹ Ibid.

power to form a people who can acknowledge the divided character of the world yet offer hospitality.⁵²

Alasdair MacIntyre

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the language of morality has suffered the same fate as the language of science. What we possess are fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts that lack the context from which their significance derived. We continue to utilize many of the key expressions. Yet we have become powerless to detect the disorders of moral thought and practice.⁵³ Thus the moral structures that were advanced by the Enlightenment have failed, and they were doomed to failure because the language of morality had been divorced from its grounding in Aristotelian teleology. Medieval ethics was made up of a belief that human life begins with undisciplined natures. Yet there existed the assumption that human life has a virtuous end and, thus, an ethical code. Ethics was the science which was to enable us to understand how we make the transition from the state of the individuals we happen to be to the individuals we could become if we realized our essential nature.⁵⁴

According to MacIntyre, the vision that drove ethics was lost during the Enlightenment. Ethics had presupposed some account of potential to act, some account of the essence of the individual as a rational being, and some come account of the human *telos*.⁵⁵ Without a proper end to aim toward, codes of virtuous conduct became things that

⁵² Ibid., 93, 251.

⁵³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

humans would do if they were virtuous. Since the Enlightenment, philosophers could no longer start with a shared understanding of the proper ending and reason to construct the ethical rules that would result. Instead, they had to derive a system of ethics from only their understanding of basic human nature. Yet there was no way with which to rationally derive an ethical system that has no particular end in view.

According to MacIntyre, an individual's narrative informs her or his behavior. He argues that we can only answer the question about what we are to do if we can answer the prior question about what narrative do we find ourselves a part.⁵⁶ Thus it is essential to be embedded within a tradition that provides a coherent narrative that frames the beginning of our story and moves us toward the ending. There is no universal, objective morality outside of human experience. Conceptions of a good along with the grounds for the authority of laws and virtues can only be discovered by entering into those relationships with which constitute communities whose central bond is a shared vision of goods and an understanding of them.⁵⁷ Epistemological progress consists in the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narratives.⁵⁸ MacIntyre argues that what we need to achieve at this stage is the construction of new forms of community within which civility, intellectual life, and moral life can be sustained so that morality and civility can survive the coming ages of the new dark ages.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 457.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 263.

James McClendon

James McClendon sought to use narrative to enhance spirituality within everyday Christian life. The point of *Biography as Theology* was to show one way in which theologians may do better work through an attention to compelling biographies. A key to these biographies is the dominant images which may be found in the lives of which they speak. Dag Hammarskjöld and Martin Luther King, Jr., were possessed of certain characteristic images.⁶⁰ Our biographical subjects contribute to the theology of the community of sharers of their faith by showing how certain archetypical images of that faith apply to their own lives and circumstances.⁶¹ McClendon argues that theology must be at least biography. By attending to those lives, we find ways of reforming our own theologies, making them more true and faithful to our ancient vision and more adequate to the present age.⁶² Understanding that Christian character is shaped by narratives, he upholds the view that human experience has a narrative form.⁶³ He argues that sacred narratives, by which individuals live, are representative of the dwelling place of humanity, for individuals live within a narrative. McClendon argues that the convergence of such images in a person helps to form his or her characteristic vision or outlook.⁶⁴ Such images are a clue to character. Here images are significant as they help an individual to discover central or formative convictions, revealing what an individual stands for and who he or she is. McClendon represented an approach to narrative that is pragmatic in order to enhance the spiritual lives of the people by the use of narrative. He

⁶⁰ James W. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 89.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

emphasized the construction of new narratives to develop and make sense of narratives that were received.

Conclusion

I will draw upon these narrative theorists in grounding my youth ministry program, emphasizing in particular the following themes: 1) The Christian faith and theology are narrative, and thus to know an individual's faith heritage requires knowing this narrative. 2) Identity is narrative in structure. 3) Christian ethics is narrative in structure, and thus how an individual acts and should act is determined by the narratives that shape the individual. 4) Spirituality can be nurtured by narrative. 5) Culture offers narratives that contrast with Christian narratives, and such cultural narratives need to be critiqued.

1) The Christian faith and theology are narrative. According to Niebuhr, a confession of key narratives from church history and scripture, including the Exodus and life of Christ, are at the core of the faith.⁶⁵ Becoming part of a community means adopting its history. The history of an individual's community is part of the individual just as he or she is part of that history. The way to understand the truth of revelation is to be on the inside of a history, to accept the narrative of the community as one's own. The way internal history can speak to external history is by confession, the telling of its narrative. An individual in a community adopts memories to become part of the narrative community. Furthermore, an individual is a derivative of a community that comes before

⁶⁵ Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 16.

him or her. Crites divides the narratives through which individuals live their lives between sacred stories and mundane ones.⁶⁶ Sacred stories are similar to Niebuhr's concept of revelation as the core narrative, which all other narratives center around and in which light they are told.

2) Identity is narrative in structure. Crites argues that life is narrative, and one experiences everything as narrative.⁶⁷ Sacred stories are the key narratives that an individual might seek to live out. Furthermore, Crites reveals that the narrative form of consciousness is shaped by the sacred narrative to which it awakens and also finds expression in the mundane narratives that articulate its sense of reality.⁶⁸ Consciousness grasps its objects in an inherently temporal way, and the temporal way is narrative at its core. The experience of a past, present, and future requires narrative to make sense of life. Furthermore, if a sacred, core narrative no longer illuminates an individual's life, he or she can change the narratives by which he or she lives.

3) Christian ethics is narrative in structure. Crites reveals that ethical authority is a function of a common narrative coherence of life.⁶⁹ The relationship between narrative and ethics is as follows: One acts in the world as one sees. Hauerwas maintains that such seeing is determined by the person one has become through the narratives that one has learned and embodied in life.⁷⁰ Notably, the narratives one lives by are the moral units of one's character. Narratives are claims about existence. Hauerwas maintains that they are about the individual one should be.⁷¹ One's personal narratives are established from one's

⁶⁶ Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," 70.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁰ Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 69.

⁷¹ Ibid., 75.

cultural inheritance, faith, and biography. Developed through virtues, one's character is more significant than isolated actions. To make sense of morality, ethics needs to take into account this background. According to Hauerwas, a narrative that will provide a direction for our character must be appropriate to the tragic aspect of our existence, and such a narrative is a truthful narrative.⁷² The tragic nature of existence refers to the situation in which one might try to act toward that which is best although something else might happen. According to Hauerwas, a criterion one might utilize for judging the truth of a narrative cannot be independent of a substantive narrative and will involve accepting tragedy without falling into self-deception.⁷³ Because the skills to live a true life in the midst of tragedy arise historically, community becomes a significant category. Narratives that claim significance will form a community that seeks to live out such narratives. In terms of a faith narrative, Hauerwas asserts that the church needs to be a community that keeps alive that language and narrative to shape lives in a truthful way.⁷⁴

Problematic is the standard account of morality, i.e., the prevailing theories in the study of ethics. The standard account maintains that objective rules and guidelines might be arrived at and that such rules should govern actions by individuals regardless of social setting. However, morality makes sense from within a narrative, and moral explanations that are not supported by a community's narrative will fail. In terms of everyday actions, individuals do not reason and discern principles and rules. Rather, individuals act automatically according to the people they are, i.e., according to their character.

⁷² Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

Hauerwas claims that the test of a narrative is the person the narrative creates.⁷⁵

According to Hauerwas, a narrative that will be successful needs to provide power to release an individual from destructive alternatives, ways of seeing through current distortions, space to keep an individual from resorting to violence, and a sense of the tragic.⁷⁶ An individual is born into a history and given a future according to the narrative he or she adopts. Narratives are the meaning of life. An individual's narrative keeps him or her tied to a community and exposes self-deceptions in the individual's narrative. For Hauerwas, a narrative needs to allow one to accept responsibility for the destructive actions in one's life and communities as they allow one to improve and develop character.⁷⁷

Hauerwas argues that the church is a proper community for the faith narrative.⁷⁸ A problem is that the church has sought to adopt narratives that are not its own. Instead, the church needs to be faithful to its own distinct narrative. Hauerwas maintains that for the Christian narrative, the life of Christ is the proper ethic. Scripture and tradition are sources of authority for engaging changing and complex problems.⁷⁹ Hauerwas sees no other source of morality outside the narrative experience of a community.⁸⁰

4) Spirituality can be nurtured by narrative.⁸¹ Life narratives can be models for one's spiritual life. One can learn from biographies such as those of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dag Hammarskjöld. Such formative figures reveal lives through which an individual might see her or his life for spiritual direction. Such a spiritual approach looks

⁷⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 98.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁸¹ See McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology*.

to the history of a community and sacred texts as narrative guides. Furthermore, spiritual life can be nurtured by modeling one's life narrative after formative figures of faith.

5) Culture offers narratives that contrast with Christian narratives, and such cultural narratives need to be critiqued. One needs to be reflective of cultural narratives that constitute an individual's narrative resources.⁸² According to Hauerwas, such narratives are replete with characters who reveal how life can be lived. Hauerwas argues that drawing upon such narratives, young people can learn about their identity, who might be characters in the narrative into which they have been born, and how life might be lived.⁸³ These narratives provide young people with models to emulate in their development of character.

Characters in cultural narratives offering models for adolescents might include James Bond and Frodo. Such cultural narratives provide characters that youth might wish to emulate. According to Hauerwas, they provide a moral constraint upon the personalities of the individuals who inhabit them.⁸⁴ The characters offer parameters for the behavior of individuals with similar roles. Each character has her or his limits. For example, sexual promiscuity might be within the limits of a Hollywood actor or actress. Cultural narratives have numerous characters from which to choose. Some are more helpful than others. These include popular and renowned characters in films. According to Hauerwas, such characters can be moral representatives of their culture by the ways in which moral ideas assume an embodied existence through them.⁸⁵ The moral activities of the characters of cultural narratives offer a measure with which young people can

⁸² MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 28.

evaluate themselves and others. Characters of cultural narratives offer examples of morality, and individuals can judge themselves morally upon the basis of these characters. The characters can provide both negative and positive examples. While negative examples need to be critiqued, young people can learn from positive examples of characters who might reveal the ideals of culture.

In this chapter, I presented some formative figures of Narrative Theology to explore the emergence of their insights on narrative. First, the researcher analyzed H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation*, providing the background of Narrative Theology. Then the researcher addressed the emergence of Narrative Theology by Stephen Crites' work, "The Narrative Quality of Experience." After his work, Narrative Theology developed rapidly. The first theologians include Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre who engaged narrative and ethics, and James McClendon who utilized biography as a spiritual instrument. These theorists offer the following insights: the Christian faith and theology are narrative and thus to know an individual's faith heritage requires knowing this narrative, identity is narrative in structure, Christian ethics is narrative in structure and thus how an individual acts and should act is determined by the narratives that shape the individual, spirituality can be nurtured by narrative, and culture offers narratives that contrast with Christian narratives and such cultural narratives need to be critiqued. This insight of cultural narratives leads us in the next chapter to analyze the work of White and Rogers on critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies. Destructive narratives are perpetuated in films by marketers targeting youth. Utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies, the researcher seeks to provide a space to bring to the adolescents' awareness the ideological assumptions of

filmic narratives that influence them. Critical reflection upon such narratives can allow them to dream of alternative values, contrasting with the negative ones portrayed in films that they view, and act out such dreams to bring social transformation.

Chapter 4

The Critical Consciousness and Narrative Pedagogies

This chapter examines the pedagogies of David White and Frank Rogers, Jr. that can help us understand the process of socialization. I begin by exploring the pedagogical base from which they draw, i.e., the critical pedagogies of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Then I will discuss the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies as theoretical extensions.

Freire

Paulo Freire developed literary programs in Chile, Africa, and Nicaragua. According to Freire, educational practices too often oppress individuals.¹ In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire critiques the notion of banking in education, in which a teacher deposits knowledge into students, who are treated as depositories. Here students are required to receive, memorize, and repeat the information. The curriculum treats students as objects, stifling learning and creativity. Denied their humanity and experiencing the inability to act, the individuals suffer and reject their significance.

In contrast, Freire states that the purpose of education is to liberate. Here he calls individuals to expose the myth of the status quo. Rejecting banking in education, he teaches problem-posing education, which he calls *conscientization*. This is the process wherein individuals as subjects gain a deeper awareness of the social-cultural forces that shape their existence and their ability to change that condition. Such an education allows

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Myra Bergman Ramos, trans., 30th Ann. ed. (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000).

the emergence of critical consciousness and intervention in life by the oppressed through examining the problems in their relationships with the world.

Freire calls both teachers and their students to teach. He calls them teacher-students and students-teachers. Here not only does a teacher teach. The teacher is also taught in a dialog with the students. In addition to being taught, these students also teach. The result of such an education is praxis. Praxis is the action and reflection of individuals on their world to change it. Both action and reflection need to take place. The outcome of praxis is individuals working to solve social problems.

Boal

Boal used the theater to raise significant personal and political issues. He examined the *Poetics* of Aristotle and the history of the Western theater. He denounced the Aristotelian ethic's oppression of workers and spectators and the dominant culture. Boal observed that the theater helped the government of Brazil to promote such oppression. In other words, the government utilized the theater to domesticate individuals to becoming passive consumers of such narratives to interpret life. Boal worked to bring a paradigm shift. Thus he sought to diminish the distinction between the actors and the audience. In his revolutionary concept of theater, he constructed a new theater, which was not didactic. He sought to change the theater from a monologue of traditional drama into a dialog between the audience and stage. Thus he offered a participatory theater. Such a theater was grounded upon the view that a dialogue is a common and healthy dynamic among individuals, individuals desire dialog, and individuals are able to engage in a dialog. Furthermore when a dialog becomes a monolog, oppression follows. Thus the

theater can become an instrument to transform a monolog into a dialog and uphold creating a space for learning within a community.

By emphasizing such learning, Boal's theater allowed the passive audience to become active participants as actors, contributing and working with the original actors. Theater becomes a space in which individuals can observe themselves in action. Thus the goal of his theater is action, and his methodologies require observing oneself and one's community. Boal sought to develop and shape this project by transforming the theater into an instrument with which to understand the issues and problems of individuals and their communities and to seek solutions. Thus the theater can be adapted for an educational context. Such education would entail examining and engaging themes that emerged in the theaters.

Augusto Boal directed the Arena Theater in Brazil. There he realized the social function and political significance of theater. Inspired by Brecht, he reflected upon ways in which the theater might become a space for the education of the community. As a result, he established the Joker System, which was a way to share texts and create new texts. For example, he transformed European dramas so that the public could identify with them. Furthermore, he reflected upon multiple interpretations of diverse realities while analyzing them.

Boal's objectives had four tenets. First, he utilized Brecht's ideas of defamiliarization. In other words, the characters are made into simple social types through alienation techniques. Such techniques include the wearing of masks, the exaggeration of gestures, and comments on one's own character while speaking in third person. These techniques are used to create a distance between the characters and the

audience so that they might envision the characters as types of social groups. Second, the characters reverse and switch roles continually. This is done so that the characters might view the narrative in its entirety. Third, there exists the utilization of various genres and forms.² Also, he utilizes interruptions and twists in the action. Fourth, he utilizes music to support or contrast with the discourse or drama.

Initially, Boal breaks the script into episodes. Each episode is broken into scenes. Typically the Joker shares a commentary in order to bring clarification and provide a transition among the scenes. Also, the Joker might conduct interviews between the scenes. Boal's Joker System has various aspects. First, the drama starts with a dedication to an individual, group, or event relevant to the audience. Next, the Joker provides an explanation to understand the drama. Here the Joker provides guidelines for participation in the drama. The drama concludes with an exhortation to live in light of the topic, theme, and insights of the drama. Frequently they might engage in a discussion or debate. Also, scenes might be changed and reenacted in view of the audience's response. The Joker manifests the implicit operations, which Brecht performs with his characters and drama techniques. The purpose of such techniques is to create a space for critical reflection. The Joker is comparable to individuals in Brecht's audience, asking questions and providing a commentary.

With the purpose of encouraging creativity and developing the audience, Boal utilized drama exercises, games, and improvisations. Boal shaped his workshops into different activities. The first is presenting background information on his theater and the different exercises led by the facilitator. He presents information at the start of the

² See Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Adrian Jackson, trans. (New York: Theater Communications Group, 1985), 126-130. Such forms include cartoons, debate, interviews, manifestos, melodrama, and realism.

workshop and during the games and exercises. Furthermore, he gathers the participants at various times in order to listen to responses to the games and other processes. The second activity is comprised of the games. The aim of such games is to encourage the participants to listen to that which they are sensing. Other aims are to heighten their senses, warm-up, and move past traditional thinking and interacting, engage one another, develop relationships, and deepen trust. The third activity is comprised of the exercises. Such exercises are designed to weave structure with content.

The three activities emphasize different types of participation in dramaturgy, Image Theater, and Forum Theater. In dramaturgy, individuals write or communicate through the images they make with their bodies. In Forum Theater, individuals intervene in the drama, replacing other individuals and changing their actions. Through the three activities, participants are encouraged to dream of solutions and participate actively. As a group, the participants engage one another to discuss relevant themes or problems and dream of different actions in response to these problems.

David F. White

Assumptions and Rationale

White's pedagogy seeks to empower adolescents as agents of faith and equip them through critical consciousness to transform their communities as they discern and engage structures that influence the lives of adolescents. White observes a problem with current trends in youth ministry: Youth ministries have internalized the cultural assumption that adolescents are not capable of participating in the full life of the church. Youth ministries might affirm their belief that adolescents are gifted and capable of faith.

However, the way most youth ministry programs are set up contradict their beliefs about adolescents and their abilities. Thus often youth are given marginal spaces in the corners of churches in order to entertain them with fun and games until they become adults, or teach them from the scriptures without engaging the needs and brokenness of their communities. Thus there exists a need for youth ministry to empower adolescents to discern and engage with the issues and problems of their communities as agents.³

White calls youth ministries to engage in practices of discernment. Such discernment involves seeking to understand structures that influence adolescent life. Discernment involves a deepening understanding of the cultural influences among adolescents and the ways in which they might resist negative cultural influences. According to White, discernment should have the components of listening, understanding, dreaming, and acting.

Listening

Listening is the first step of White's pedagogy of critical consciousness. The pedagogy of critical consciousness⁴ of David White is structured by providing opportunities to listen in order to attend to emotions and passions around concrete circumstances. According to White, such passions are the source from which the individual's ethical and moral decisions flow. In other words, that for which the individual loves and yearns is key to her or his understanding of moral decisions. Such passion represents how the individual is touched by and moved toward God. However,

³ See David F. White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 63.

⁴ Critical consciousness is the ability to perceive economic, political, and social oppression and to act against oppressive forces.

the individual also forms attachments in unhealthy ways, such as addictions, prejudices, destructive patterns, brokenness, or complexes that move us away from others, truth, beauty, goodness, life, and God.

An individual can work against the negative influences by attending to her or his emotions and passions and the situations and relationships connected with them. According to White, one's experience is influenced by social and cultural forces, familial and communal patterns, and psychological dynamics that might be unconscious. Thus anger might stem from acts of injustice against an individual or community. And by attending to the anger, the individual might envision how life can be different. Such passions make us human and allow individuals to become who they were designed to be in relationships with God and one another. Listening to an individual's passions allows one to discern where there is life and where it is absent. Thus an individual can participate in transforming life.

Aims of listening include the following: 1) Cultivating emotions appropriate to one's situations, i.e., ortho-pathos.⁵ According to White, listening to one's heart creates the possibility of examining one's hidden and unhidden motives and responses, and the contexts in which they occur, to create more space for love to be expressed in our communities.⁶ 2) Helping to problematize situations, to surface them from their context and analyze their meaning, and to name them as issues and problems to address.⁷

According to White, one can problematize situations by identifying the specific situations

⁵ See White, *Practicing Discernment*, 93, 96.

⁶ Ibid., 96.

⁷ Ibid., 98.

in the various contexts of adolescent life in which youth experience emotions, including sadness, anger, frustration, joy, or contentment.⁸

Methods of listening include the following: 1) Creating small groups for listening.⁹ According to White, youth groups can promote listening by forming groups of three, asking each group to discuss and record their answers to questions, including, “What are your worries about this community?” and “What are the main problems you experience in this community?”¹⁰ 2) Utilizing theater games to encourage youth to surface ways youth take external social structures and internalize them.¹¹ White explains that after youth have surfaced such habits, they can reflect upon them critically.¹² 3) Utilizing team surveys.¹³ According to White, youth can spend time outside of youth group meetings to listen to the conversations of youth, talking about what concerns them.¹⁴

Understanding

Understanding is the second step of White’s pedagogy of critical consciousness.¹⁵ Here White’s pedagogy offers an individual the opportunities to understand the complexity of the circumstances of adolescents, engaging intellectually the historical, economic, political, and cultural issues behind them. Here the individual moves beyond listening to understanding the cause of the situation that leads the individual to feel the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 101.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 104.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 122.

emotions and passions. In Aquinas' view, an individual, as a rational being, has the ability to participate in ordering herself or himself and her or his world toward God. An individual, created in the image of God, has an innate attraction to God. And the individual's moral project is to become who he or she was created to be, i.e., fully alive and human, in a relationship of love with God, and ordered in our relationships in and with others in her or his communities. An individual needs the intellect for such ordering. For such ordering, an individual needs the practices of observing and describing, as well as reflecting critically.

Because an individual's passions emerge in relationship with concrete circumstances, understanding involves observing and describing the situations that stir the emotions and passions. An individual needs to name the situations evoking the emotions and passions. Also, understanding entails reflecting critically and asking questions about the personal and social dynamics surrounding situations. An individual can understand ways in which a situation is shaped by economic, political, and cultural forces. Cultural influence can include images of film. In critical consciousness, the individual moves beyond listening to emotions to understanding the complex situations.

Aims of understanding include the following: 1) Understanding the world's distortions and seeking ways to extend love more completely into the world to heal its wounds.¹⁶ According to White, Jesus' love requires analysis of oppressive powers and principalities.¹⁷ 2) Affirming the significance of making sense of discrete experiences,

¹⁶ Ibid., 120.

¹⁷ Ibid.

accurately viewing them and their relationships.¹⁸ Here White emphasizes coherence, i.e., how one makes sense of one's experiences and gives them meaning.¹⁹

Methods of understanding include the following: 1) Creating clearness committees.²⁰ Following a Quaker tradition, youth can call together a group of youth to consider decisions. The members of the group can ask questions to help surface issues, concerns, and understandings to help them.²¹ 2) Utilizing theater exercises to problematize their lives.²² Following Augusto Boal's use of theater exercises, youth leaders can utilize such exercises to invite youth to surface the experiences of their lives to make them conscious of such experiences.²³ 3) Utilizing codes among youth.²⁴ Here he draws upon the work of Paulo Freire who entered communities, created drawings, and took pictures of various situations within which the community lived. Then he showed them to small groups and asked the following: "What do you see? What is happening here? What are they feeling? What is your experience of this? Does this happen in your community?"²⁵ Thus youth leaders can discern the situations in the lives of youth that constitute their contexts and stimulate conversation about the situations.²⁶

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 121.

²⁰ Ibid., 126.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 129.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 133.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 132.

Dreaming

Dreaming is the third step of White's pedagogy of critical consciousness.²⁷ His pedagogy presents opportunities to dream about other ways of being. This includes developing a vision for how the world could be other than it is. It includes engaging expressions of the community of faith, including scriptures, traditions, spiritual practices, and liturgies. Such resources of the faith community allow the individual to recall and nurture her or his passion for God through remembering scripture, their understanding of God's presence and work in the world, the practices of baptism and communion, fellowship of the community of faith, prayer, and serving among those with needs and brokenness in this world. Such resources are not to be applied mechanically but as opportunities to experience the love of God and community. They are not formulas to apply lightly upon the brokenness of the world. According to White, dreaming involves the practice of reflecting on the instruction and demands of scripture to envision new, faithful ways to transform and heal the world. Discipleship calls us beyond listening and understanding into envisioning ways that enable one to connect with scriptures and symbols to discern where God is at work and where they can participate with God's work and resist forces that are not life-giving.

Aims of dreaming include the following: 1) Calling youth to reflect on ways to love and be reconciled with God and their neighbors.²⁸ According to White, youth hunger to engage the call of their hearts to love God and their neighbor.²⁹ 2) Seeking God's direction in relation to situations revealed by the heart as places where life is limited or

²⁷ Ibid., 143.

²⁸ Ibid., 142.

²⁹ Ibid.

full.³⁰ White explains that dreaming connects one's narratives, including our deep yearnings for our own and the world's reconciliation.³¹

Methods of dreaming include the following: 1) Creating Bible studies.³² White encourages youth groups to explore the love of God through studies of the Bible and introducing themes, such as consumerism, body image, and the challenges of an image culture.³³ 2) Utilizing theater exercises.³⁴ Following Augusto Boal's use of theater exercises, youth leaders can utilize such exercises to invite youth to bring their faith into conversation with their contexts. For White's exploration groups, youth can discuss an issue or problem within their communities, create a play that articulates a problem, enact the problem without a resolution to the problem, and debrief.³⁵ 3) Interviewing leaders in the community of faith.³⁶ White suggests that youth can learn from the experience that can be drawn from older individuals who have sought to live faithfully in their lives.³⁷

Acting

Acting is the fourth step of White's pedagogy of critical consciousness.³⁸ Here the individual can ask how the previous steps of the pedagogy call us to change actions or shape our behaviors. Action needs to follow reflection. Both are needed. Actions are reflected upon and reshaped. The pedagogy provides opportunities to act upon their

³⁰ Ibid., 152.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 159.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 164.

³⁷ Ibid., 165.

³⁸ Ibid., 188.

reflections and to learn from on-going reflection of their actions in order to refine and redefine them.

By acting, adolescents are able to move beyond the fun and games of youth ministries to participate in God's work in their communities. Thus they can become agents, not objects that receive action or passive consumers. Instead, they can actively partner with God in serving among those with needs and brokenness and in healing the world.

Aims of acting include the following: 1) Engaging youth in exploring their faith in active love of God and neighbor.³⁹ Here White calls youth leaders to nurture compassion and reflection to mobilize a change to challenge their culture.⁴⁰ 2) Help youth to engage in the reconciliation of the world and their selves.⁴¹ White argues that youth yearn to be actors in history and not simply acted upon.⁴²

Methods of acting include the following: 1) Clarifying aims.⁴³ White states that in preparing for appropriate action, youth leaders can help youth to identify aims so that action projects follow from their reflections.⁴⁴ Here youth leaders can invite youth to create aims by asking: "In view of our reflections, we can participate with God to heal our communities by aiming to ____." Thus youth leaders can help youth to focus their actions in response to their critical and theological reflections.⁴⁵ 2) Brainstorming.⁴⁶ According to White, Youth leaders can invite youth to engage in a session of

³⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 187.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

brainstorming about possible responses to situations they have shared.⁴⁷ 3) Planning.⁴⁸

According to White, youth groups can determine what they are doing, when, where, and what resources are needed.⁴⁹ 4) Implementation.⁵⁰ According to White as the action project is being implemented, youth leaders can remind the youth of their reflections that led them to the action.⁵¹

Frank Rogers, Jr.

In view of the educational power of narrative, Frank Rogers, Jr. created the Narrative Pedagogies Project in order to explore how the diversity of narrative-based educational methods can be utilized within ministries among young people.⁵² His aim was to surface the range of narrative pedagogies.⁵³ Narrative pedagogies are educational methods that use the narrative arts, such as storytelling, drama, and creative writing, to nurture theological reflection, spiritual growth, and social empowerment.⁵⁴ For example, "Acting 4 Change," his program for adolescents from youth groups in and surrounding Claremont, explored the adolescents' lives and faith utilizing drama.⁵⁵ The structure of his program drew upon Augusto Boal's "Theater of the Oppressed." Rogers utilized Boal's principles for a context of youth ministry. Rogers observes that youth ministry programs have domesticated adolescents. As in the theaters, which Boal critiques, youth ministry programs tend to view adolescents as passive spectators who often simply

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 195.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See Frank Rogers, Jr., *Finding God in the Graffiti* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 15.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

receive teachings of the narratives of their faith. On the one hand, such teachings allow the adolescents to hear narratives of the faith that communities of faith utilize for meaning making as well as narratives, which place human experience in the context of God's work in the world. On the other hand, such ministry among adolescents does not give them the opportunity to become empowered as agents in the process of making meaning of their lives in relationship with the narratives of their faith. Through Rogers' narrative pedagogies, adolescents become empowered as they are given the opportunities to highlight and reflect critically upon the narratives of their social and cultural connects. Furthermore, they are given the opportunity to engage critically the narrative of their faith and to probe for meaning and depth. Also, they are given the opportunity to become agents who actively weave the narrative of their lives with the narrative of their social and cultural contexts and with the narratives of their faith.

Over a period of ten years, adolescents in southern California have participated in these narrative explorations. Each of the young people participated in different types of narrative pedagogies and experienced sacred encounters. Yet such experiences were diverse. Rogers identifies the following six approaches to narrative pedagogies: religious literacy, personal identity, contemplative encounter, critical reflection, creative vitality, and social empowerment approaches to narrative pedagogies.⁵⁶

Narrative Pedagogy and Religious Literacy

According to Rogers, the aims of religious literacy approaches to narrative pedagogies are as follows: First, they help youth to learn the core narratives from their

⁵⁶ While Rogers identifies the aforementioned six approaches to narrative pedagogies, the two that are more relevant for this dissertation are critical reflection and social empowerment approaches to narrative pedagogies.

faith traditions.⁵⁷ Second, they enable theological and ethical reflection grounded in such narratives.⁵⁸ Third, they encourage youth to join the narrative—to internalize them as their own, to interpret their world through the narratives' lenses, and to respond in ways that participate with the narratives' unfolding.⁵⁹

According to Rogers, the movements of religious literacy approaches to narrative pedagogy include the following: 1) The first movement is to discern the narratives with which youth will engage.⁶⁰ According to Rogers, youth leaders cannot utilize every significant narrative. Thus in selecting the narratives, the youth leader should consider the audience for which the youth program is designed, the aims of the program, and the narratives that are most significant for them.⁶¹ 2) The second movement is to help youth experience the narrative.⁶² Rogers explains that once the narratives have been selected, youth leaders need to attend to how such narratives are presented to the youth. Roger argues that part of the power of narratives to seep into the soul and lay claim to one's identity is their ability to entrance—to transport people into their narrative realm.⁶³ 3) The third movement is to nurture reflection on the narrative.⁶⁴ According to Rogers, this movement reminds one that experience alone is not education, for simply experiencing the engaging power of a narrative is not mining that narrative's potential to illuminating the narrative's insights about God, faith, and life; understanding the layers such insights embody; and connecting them with the insights from one's life experience.⁶⁵ Here the

⁵⁷ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 40.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

youth leader seeks to cultivate various types of reflection, which include the following:⁶⁶

a) Invite reflection that surfaces one's personal connections with the story.⁶⁷ According to Rogers, such reflection is oriented around an individual's experience of the story including the emotions evoked.⁶⁸ b) Invite reflection that draws out a religious narrative's conceptual possibilities.⁶⁹ A component of narrative pedagogies is nurturing the capacities, which include discerning and articulating theological insights that are embedded within religious narratives.⁷⁰

Narrative Pedagogy and Personal Identity

Rogers articulates the following aims of personal identity approaches to narrative pedagogies: First, they help youth to access the narratives⁷¹ that constitute their sense of self-identity.⁷² Second, they expose youth to the communal narratives of their cultural and religious traditions.⁷³ Third, through a critical and creative synthesis of self-narratives and communal narratives, they help youth in constructing a coherent sense of narrative identity that is meaningful, healing, and life-giving.⁷⁴

According to Rogers, the movements of personal identity approaches to narrative pedagogy include the following: 1) The first movement is to help teens access the narratives by which they live.⁷⁵ Here youth are invited to articulate the narratives that

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Such narratives are often subliminal.

⁷² See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 64.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

form their personal identity.⁷⁶ 2) The second movement is to nurture critical reflection on these narratives.⁷⁷ Here the youth reflect critically to surface and make conscious the life-giving and life-denying dynamics within the narratives they are living. Without such reflection, such dynamics remain hidden.⁷⁸ 3) The third movement is to expose youth to liberative narrative from their religious and cultural contexts.⁷⁹ According to Rogers, the life-changing power of this approach lies in reinterpreting our narratives through the lens of liberative narratives within our cultural and religious traditions.⁸⁰ 4) The fourth movement is to engage in a dialogue between our self-stories and the liberative stories of our religious and cultural traditions.⁸¹ Having accessed the narratives of the youth and presented some of their liberative narratives, youth leaders can invite a dialogue between them.⁸²

Narrative Pedagogy and Contemplative Encounter

According to Rogers, the aims of contemplative encounter approaches to narrative pedagogies are as follows: First, they help youth to experience the emotional realities embedded within sacred narratives.⁸³ Second, they foster personal transformation through imaginative reenactments of sacred narratives infused with the emotional realities of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 69.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 89.

youth.⁸⁴ Third, they facilitate an encounter with the Sacred through the interplay between the sacred text and their own imaginative capacities.⁸⁵

According to Rogers, the movements of contemplative encounter approaches to narrative pedagogy include the following: 1) The first movement is to create a safe space in which deep encounters can take place.⁸⁶ The cultivation of safe space is an important approach to a narrative pedagogy for facilitating such encounters. Notably, a safe space is nurtured by attending to the space that teens will utilize.⁸⁷ According to Rogers, the environment can enhance or deter from an encounter of depth.⁸⁸ 2) The second movement is to engage the youth.⁸⁹ Rogers argues that the engagement of teens needs to be cultivated. Thus youth leaders can help youth warm-up their imagination, their body, and their emotional availability.⁹⁰ 3) The last movement includes debriefing the significance of the experience.⁹¹ Such debriefing invites reflection on personal encounters with narratives, asking questions on what surfaced and what was experienced.⁹²

Narrative Pedagogy and Critical Reflection

According to Rogers, the aims of critical reflection approaches to narrative pedagogies are as follows: First, they bring to awareness the cultural and religious narratives that influence young people subliminally. Second, they invite critical reflection

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 91.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 95.

⁹² Ibid..

upon the ideological assumptions within the narratives. Third, they empower youth to construct narratives embodying liberative assumptions.

According to Rogers, the movements of critical reflection approaches to narrative pedagogy include the following: 1) The first movement is to expose youth to the cultural and religious narratives that subliminally shape their lives.⁹³ Doing so helps to nurture among them a critical consciousness toward such narratives that might impact youth subliminally through the narrative's assumptions and values.⁹⁴ 2) The second movement is to surface the ideological assumptions that are embedded in the narrative.⁹⁵ According to Rogers, youth leaders can provide youth with the lenses that reveal the subliminal ideological assumptions within cultural narratives. Steps include the following:⁹⁶ a) Asking critical questions about the storyteller.⁹⁷ According to Rogers, ideological agenda can be revealed by asking questions including, "Who do you think wrote this story, who keeps telling this story in our community, and how do they benefit from its implicit agenda?"⁹⁸ b) Exploring a narrative's social function.⁹⁹ This is a significant step, for narratives can serve ideological purposes, including selling liquor and other specific products.¹⁰⁰ 3) The last movement is to invite teens to articulate the values they want to promote and embody.¹⁰¹ According to Rogers, critical reflection entails becoming

⁹³ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 120.

conscious of personal and cultural assumptions, holding them in view of rational scrutiny, and choosing the values and viewpoints that one will espouse and live out.¹⁰²

“A Third Way,” was a dramatic arts program exploring nonviolent responses to the events of 9/11. At the program, Rogers exposed significant cultural narratives that shape adolescents. Problematically, films are replete with narratives perpetuating the myth of redemptive violence. Thus he invited the participants to list the most popular films released before and in the aftermath of the attacks upon the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Their list included the following: *Spider Man*, *Harry Potter*, a James Bond film, *X-Men*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Mission Impossible*, and *Men in Black II*. Then, Rogers helped the youth to surface the ideological assumptions that are embedded in the narrative. Exploring critical questions about the narrative, his repertoire of questions included, “What does this action film plotline assume about violence?” Then providing a structural template, Walter Wink’s myth of redemptive violence was utilized to reflect upon action films.¹⁰³ Then to contrast alternative value systems, the youth explored principles of nonviolence, practices of forgiveness, and conditions of reconciliation that are accountable. Thus the myth of redemptive violence perpetuated in action films became exposed when reflected upon critically.

Narrative Pedagogy and Creative Vitality

According to Rogers, the aims of creative vitality approaches to narrative pedagogies are as follows: First, they introduce youth to the tradition and craft of various

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13.

narrative art forms.¹⁰⁴ Second, they nurture and affirm the uncensored, creative self-expression of youth.¹⁰⁵ Third, they celebrate adolescent creativity through public performances and festive receptions.¹⁰⁶

According to Rogers, the movements of creative vitality approaches to narrative pedagogy include the following: 1) The first movement is to engage the youth.¹⁰⁷ Here youth leaders invite youth to explore a narrative art form expressing an emotional truth. Thus a hospitable context needs to be created, and the engagement of youth within it needs to be cultivated.¹⁰⁸ 2) The second movement is to craft the narrative.¹⁰⁹ Here youth leaders help youth to write the narratives they will perform for their community. Crafting a narrative involves steps including the following:¹¹⁰ a) Find the core of a narrative. The first step is to identify the narrative the youth wishes to tell. According to Rogers, the youth leader is looking for the basic idea of the narrative.¹¹¹ b) Identify the narrative elements: According to Rogers, youth should attend to the narrative elements, for this teaches them the essential components common to the narratives while helping them refine such elements within the narrative they are creating.¹¹²

Narrative Pedagogy and Social Empowerment

According to Rogers, the aims of social empowerment approaches to narrative pedagogies are as follows: First, they surface and label the social conditions of

¹⁰⁴ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 143.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 145.

communities oppressing the lives within them. Second, they create narrative scenes, which problematize such issues in order for youth to reflect critically and practice interventions. Third, they build upon the power of narrative to empower youth in mobilizing for social change in their communities.

According to Rogers, the movements of social empowerment approaches to narrative pedagogy include the following: 1) The first movement is to activate the body, soul, and imagination of the youth, engaging their participation.¹¹³ According to Rogers, such engagement is significant for activating dramatic muscles and contagious energy, as well as developing group connection.¹¹⁴ 2) The second movement is to surface the generative themes of a community.¹¹⁵ Here the youth leader explores the concerns that are relevant to the youth.¹¹⁶ 3) The third movement is to problematize the generative themes in scenes that capture the core of the social conflict.¹¹⁷ Such scenes are open-ended, inviting reflection about intervention. 4) The fourth movement is to invite the youth to discuss and role-play liberative interventions within the social conflict.¹¹⁸

According to Rogers if the scene depicts an issue of generative passion realistically, the need for resolution will activate responses for exploration.¹¹⁹ 5) The fifth movement is to embody the liberative agency rehearsed on the stage in the real-life contexts of the participants' lives.¹²⁰ According to Rogers, the purpose of liberative narrative pedagogy is to discover interventions and mobilize for their implementation.¹²¹

¹¹³ Ibid., 174.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 175.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 180.

¹²¹ Ibid.

The social justice group at St. Timothy's high school convened at a planning retreat. An aim of the youth was to brainstorm an issue to engage during the academic year. After engaging the participants utilizing a sequence of exercises, group-building activities, and warm-up games to activate their bodies, souls, and imaginations, Rogers sought to surface the generative themes relevant to their academic community. Thus he placed pictures upon the floor. They were images of brokenness in our world that included the following: a starving child, a sewage dump, mass grave sites, deforestation, and nuclear silos near a school. Rogers invited the participants to select an image that moved them and to create a character that has experienced such a wound. Then the participants wrote and read monologues of the characters voicing their experience. This exercise was utilized to engage images of wounds with which they were able to identify, symbolizing deeper passions. Then they problematized the generative themes in their community through activating scenes that reveal the nature of the conflict. For the participants, vignettes centered upon a character in their play facing a decision between drinking with his friends and entering a program for rehabilitation. Then as Rogers invited the youth to discuss and role-play interventions within the social conflict, the group identified aspects of the conflict that need further research. Thus the youth talked with the individuals involved with the conflict, examined the disciplinary procedures of their school, and explored visions of justice that were more life-giving. Then the participants extended the agency rehearsed on stage into their lived contexts. After exploring through improvisation how to embody such justice in the conflict of their academic community, they created a play. Then as empowered agents, they petitioned to perform it before their school. They won the petition to perform the play. For these

agents of change, their play became the catalyst to convene and inspire change at an assembly at their school on the promise of restorative justice. The experience of creating, petitioning for, and performing their play impassioned these youth to engage in further social action.

Conclusion

I will draw upon the aforementioned work of Freire, Boal, White, and Rogers in grounding my program. These theorists articulate the following themes: 1) Raising critical consciousness, 2) Empowering agency, 3) Practicing discernment with adolescents to resist passive consumerism, and 4) Engaging youth through the use of narrative pedagogies that nurture critical reflection and inspire social empowerment.

1) Raising critical consciousness. For Freire, a significant aim is raising a critical consciousness of historical and social contexts. His method emphasizes problem solving. A result is conscientization, i.e., an awareness of one's oppression and engaging structures of such oppression. Freire's pedagogy focuses upon social change. He critiques "banking education," which leads to passivity. In contrast, Freire's problem-posing process is a dialogical one in which the teacher and student learn together.¹²² Here the learner is a subject, as opposed to an object, in her or his learning experience.¹²³

2) Empowering agency. In Boal's work, there are no spectators. Instead, spectators are called to engage in action. Thus the spectators become "spect-actors." This term draws upon Freire's work in developing critical consciousness. Thus Boal calls participants to engage in action as well as to pause to analyze the action. Here the

¹²² See Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1973), 48.

¹²³ Ibid., 43.

individual moves between being a spectator and an engaged actor. Thus the spect-actor engages actively the exercises, games, improvisations, storytelling, sculpting scenes, and acting.¹²⁴ Here Boal seeks to teach individuals to act through engaging issues from their communities and analyzing the issues critically, and to transfer such action into their lives and communities.

3) Practicing discernment with adolescents to resist passive consumerism.

Marketers target youth, whose hearts they have caused to become desensitized.

According to White, the practice of listening allows adolescents to feel again, surfacing and voicing their hopes, fears, and passions.¹²⁵ Such listening is significant for critical reflection and directing emotions. White argues that the practice of understanding nurtures ways of viewing the world, along with its complexities.¹²⁶ This practice enables youth to see suffering in the world and participate with God in its healing. White argues that the practice of dreaming enables adolescents to draw upon faith narratives to reflect upon dimensions beyond immediate impulses to develop visions beyond a superficial response.¹²⁷ The practice of acting enables youth to engage their communities creatively to usher reconciliation and healing.

4) Engaging youth utilizing narrative pedagogies to nurture critical consciousness and inspire social empowerment.

Narrative pedagogies nurture critical reflection. Rogers explains that in view of the problematic narratives of culture that perpetuate stereotypes, narrative can raise a critical consciousness.¹²⁸ He asserts that such narratives, which

¹²⁴ Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 126-130. See also Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Adrian Jackson, trans. (London: Routledge, 1992), 164-201.

¹²⁵ White, *Practicing Discernment*, 96.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹²⁸ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 58.

socialize adolescents, are screened through Hollywood blockbusters.¹²⁹ Narrative pedagogies also nurture social empowerment. According to Rogers drawing upon the power of narrative to mobilize for social transformation, these pedagogies utilize narrative to surface narratives of oppression and empower youth mobilizing them as agents for intervention.¹³⁰ Rogers maintains here that narrative pedagogies bring social change and move adolescents from being passive spectators experiencing oppression to becoming agents creating narratives of hope and embodying their agency in life.¹³¹

In this chapter, I presented four theorists on critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies. I analyzed the educational pedagogies of White and Rogers, beginning by examining the critical pedagogies of Freire and Boal whose they draw upon. White's work addresses the need for adolescents to engage in a practice of discernment. Rogers' work reveals the significance of narrative to nurture theological reflection, spiritual growth, and social empowerment.¹³² The insights of the theorists lead us in the next chapter on my utilization of these pedagogies. I will draw upon the aforementioned theorists to develop a critical pedagogy through engaging films that adolescents view. In view of these theorists' insights on how domestication takes place among adolescents, I will seek to help youth to reflect critically upon these narratives that influence them and to become empowered agents. To intervene against the problematic influence of destructive cultural narratives in films that adolescents view, youth need to engage and reflect upon them critically.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 171, 175.

¹³¹ Ibid., 180.

¹³² Ibid., 15.

Through this transformative process, adolescents can recreate their narrative lives. My intention is to help youth to become such agents through providing a space for them to dream of different narratives for themselves and their communities. I will lead them through movements that engage films as agents. In engaging and conversing on films that are popular among youth, they learn to exercise agency. The program provides a space for such learning as a community. Both the leader and participants act as agents in the role of discerning the content of cultural narratives, reflecting upon them critically and dreaming of more life-giving narratives. Through such critical reflection and social action, youth become authors of their own narrative lives. Here adolescents become agents by acting out such agency as a community.

The pedagogies of Rogers and White enable youth to dream of new narrative lives as empowered agents. Such dreaming enables adolescents to nurture critical consciousness on the destructive scripts of cultural narratives, become free from their problematic influence, and dream of ways to engage the brokenness in our communities. Such dreaming is crucial for mobilizing for social action and in order to change our life narratives as agents. Furthermore, it leads to social action as youth understand that destructive narratives can be transformed. The program seeks to allow adolescents to dream of alternative, life-giving narratives and to live out such dreams through social action to heal our broken world.

Chapter 5

Utilizing the Critical Consciousness and Narrative Pedagogies with Film

Applying the pedagogies of Frank Rogers and David White to films that are popular among adolescents can inform an empowering pedagogy for adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of films and become agents of change. These pedagogies inspired my pilot research program exploring responses to problematic filmic images. Such images are emulated by youth struggling with issues, including fragmented relationships, peer pressure, violence in communities, sexism, racism, ethno-violence, racial profiling, abuse, pornography, materialism, domestication in homes and schools, body image, alcohol and drug abuse, anger management, lack of role models, prejudice, discrimination, classism, marginalization, eating disorders, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and gang violence. In view of such challenges, I have created a pedagogy based upon the work of Rogers and White applied specifically to films.

Insights from White and Rogers

David F. White

I draw upon insights from the critical consciousness pedagogy of White. The movements from his pedagogy are as follows: 1) Listening. This practice allows youth workers to create spaces for youth to share their voices.¹ 2) Understanding. This practice nurtures ways of viewing forces in their communities including filmic marketers vying for the discretionary dollars of young people.² 3) Dreaming. Dreaming allows youth to

¹ See David F. White, *Practicing Discernment with Youth* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 96.

² Ibid, 121.

analyze the intersection of cultural narratives of films that they view with the narratives of their faith tradition to envision more life-giving ways of narrating their lives.³ 4) Acting. Rather than being domesticated by the cultural narratives of film, youth can engage in social action to heal the brokenness of their communities.⁴

Frank Rogers, Jr.

I draw upon insights from the narrative pedagogy of Rogers. Movements from Narrative Pedagogy and Religious Literacy that I incorporate into my project are as follows: 1) Discerning the narratives with which youth will engage.⁵ 2) Helping youth to experience the narrative.⁶ 3) Nurturing reflection on the narrative.⁷ Here the youth leader seeks to cultivate various types of reflection, which include the following:⁸ a) Inviting reflection that surfaces one's personal connections with the story.⁹ b) Inviting reflection that draws out a religious narrative's conceptual possibilities.¹⁰

Movements from Narrative Pedagogy and Personal Identity that I draw upon are as follows: 1) Helping teens access the narratives by which they live.¹¹ 2) Nurturing critical reflection on these narratives.¹² 3) Exposing youth to liberative narrative from

³ Ibid., 139.

⁴ Ibid., 180.

⁵ See Frank Rogers, Jr., *Finding God in the Graffiti* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 42.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹¹ Ibid., 64.

¹² Ibid., 66.

their religious and cultural contexts.¹³ 4) Engaging in a dialogue between our self-stories and the liberative stories of our religious and cultural traditions.¹⁴

Movements from Narrative Pedagogy and Contemplative Encounter that I draw upon are as follows: 1) Creating a safe space in which deep encounters can take place.¹⁵ 2) Engaging the youth.¹⁶ 3) Debriefing the significance of the experience.¹⁷

Movements from Narrative Pedagogy and Critical Reflection that I draw upon are as follows: 1) Exposing youth to the cultural and religious narratives that subliminally shape their lives.¹⁸ 2) Surfacing the ideological assumptions that are embedded in the narrative.¹⁹ Steps include the following:²⁰ a) Asking critical questions about the storyteller.²¹ b) Exploring a narrative's social function.²² 3) Inviting youth to articulate the values they want to promote and embody.²³

Movements from Narrative Pedagogy and Creative Vitality that I draw upon are as follows: 1) Engaging the youth.²⁴ 2) Crafting the narrative.²⁵ Crafting a narrative involves steps including the following:²⁶ a) Finding the core of a narrative. b) Identifying the narrative elements.

Movements from Narrative Pedagogy and Social Empowerment that I draw upon are as follows: 1) Activating the body, soul, and imagination of the youth, engaging their

¹³ Ibid., 68.

¹⁴ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁶ Ibid., 92.

¹⁷ Ibid., 95.

¹⁸ Ibid., 112.

¹⁹ Ibid., 117.

²⁰ Ibid., 116.

²¹ Ibid., 117.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 120.

²⁴ Ibid., 141.

²⁵ Ibid., 143.

²⁶ Ibid.

participation.²⁷ 2) Surfacing the generative themes of a community.²⁸ 3) Problematizing the generative themes in scenes that capture the core of the social conflict.²⁹ 4) Inviting the youth to discuss and role-play liberative interventions within the social conflict.³⁰ 5) Embodying the liberative agency rehearsed on the stage in the real-life contexts of the participants' lives.³¹

Aims of the Pedagogy

The aims of my own pedagogy that draw upon the work of White and Rogers include the following: 1) Nurturing among adolescents an awareness and critical reflection of films that our culture invites them to consume, 2) Nurturing theological reflection on films, and 3) Empowering youth to become agents of cultural change.

1) Nurturing among adolescents an awareness of films that our culture invites them to consume. This aim draws upon Rogers' insight on the power of bringing to young people's conscious awareness the cultural narratives that subliminally shape their lives.³² Drawing upon resources on film and youth ministry, youth workers might seek to engage adolescents by screening films that the youth might not typically view on their own. Introducing adolescents to such films might serve the pedagogical aims of youth workers and provide constructive and theologically significant lessons for young people. However, I would like to advocate utilizing films that the young people are already

²⁷ Ibid., 174.

²⁸ Ibid., 175.

²⁹ Ibid., 178.

³⁰ Ibid., 179.

³¹ Ibid., 180.

³² Ibid., 112.

viewing. Such popular films are the ones socializing the adolescents. Furthermore, viewing such contemporary films with youth can lead to teachable moments to engage issues of films shaping young people.

The pedagogy can help to raise awareness of the influence of film upon young people. Such influence might include aggressive behavior, fear, and sleep disturbances. They might influence how adolescents view life and develop attitudes. They might glamorize violence as an accepted way of resolving conflicts. Often they fail to reveal the suffering and pain of victims by perpetrators of violence.

The intention of my program is to provide a space for young people to view films critically so as to avoid being manipulated by them.³³ Its strategies include selecting films thoughtfully and avoiding content that has negative effects, while reflecting upon how films might work, how films might influence the ways in which individuals perceive reality and develop attitudes, how to determine whether filmic messages are appropriate, and how to reject filmic messages that are problematic.³⁴

There exists a need for educational practices that emphasize nurturing a critical consciousness toward marketing in films as well as analyzing their content and symbolic themes.³⁵ This requires attention to the dynamics of marketing forces embodied within them.³⁶ To discern such connections, young people need to analyze the structural production and commitments of the filmmakers.³⁷ The narrative pedagogies of Frank Rogers help to nurture a critical consciousness of such cultural narratives by expanding

³³ See Michael Rich, "Address at the Public Health Summit on Entertainment Violence," American Academy of Pediatrics Media Matters, <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/mmttestimony.htm>.

³⁴ Ibid. See also American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, "Media Violence," *Pediatrics* 108 (November 2001): 1224.

³⁵ See Katherine Turpin, *Branded: Adolescents Converting from Consumer Faith* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 90.

³⁶ Ibid. This can be expanded to an analysis of cultural ideologies. See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*.

³⁷ See Turpin, *Branded*, 90.

their narrative possibilities.³⁸ According to Rogers, this can dispel the notion that such narratives can be created only by those possessing cultural power. Thus he advocates expanding the imaginative possibilities surrounding such narratives, “dislodging the ‘givenness’ of the culturally sanctioned version.”³⁹

Young people need to actively question marketing techniques.⁴⁰ Such reflection provides opportunities for a perspective of critical consciousness.⁴¹ Thus youth need to be invited into an active rather than passive viewing of films. Here youth workers can engage the youth with questions on filmic content, which adolescents might typically allow to speak to them subliminally. Such critical reflection disrupts the practice of passive consumption and allows young people to nurture a critical consciousness toward the purposes, methods, and formative effects of films.⁴²

In terms of screened violence, some research has associated exposure to screened violence with physical and mental health problems for young people, including aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, fear, depression, nightmares, and sleep disturbances.⁴³ Among the research studies conducted over the past forty years examining the association between screened violence and violent behavior, a considerable number acknowledge a correlation between screened exposure and violent behavior.⁴⁴ Films popular among youth might offer problematic images, targeting adolescents. Thus I seek to intervene against the socializing influence of screened images that might be linked to the increasing amount of violent behavior in our nation.

³⁸ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 119.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Turpin, *Branded*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 91.

⁴³ See American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, “Media Violence,” 1223.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Cf Rich, “Address at the Public Health Summit,” 1, 3.

I will employ the pedagogies of Rogers and White as instruments for intervention and to encourage positive relationships. I will advocate intervention through reflecting critically upon the content of films that youth view. The questioning of such images in youth ministries addresses aggressions as they critique scenes of violence that they might deem as unacceptable. Thus when communities view images of violence that is rewarded, they can label them as such.⁴⁵ Similarly, it is important that youth ministries screen films critically.⁴⁶

I will also explore critical questions about theological insights. This movement allows the adolescents to explore insights that might emerge when the narratives of the films and their faith traditions are engaged through a dialog. This might allow adolescents to engage their faith tradition more deeply to empower them to resist the negative influence of films. Exploring such insights might enable the adolescents to deepen their faith by allowing them to understand how God is present and working in their lives. Indeed, my program involves asking the participants, “What are the insights about God that you got from the scenes?”

The images of the kinds of popular films that adolescents view are powerful agents of socialization. Thus youth can and must reflect critically upon them. Such reflection might call to their attention the film’s problematic messages on life and how it should be lived. Such reflection might call adolescents not to simply receive passively the ideologues by filmmakers. Instead, it might call them to expose problematic ideologies, such as the myth of redemptive violence. Such reflections are the critical lenses through

⁴⁵ See Rich et. al., “Aggressors or Victims,” 673. Cf. American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, “Media Violence,” 1224. Cf. also Michael Rich, “CMCH Suggestions,” Center for Media and Child Health,” http://www.cmch.tv/mentors_parents/tv_movies_suggestions.asp.

⁴⁶ See Michael Rich, “CMCH Suggestions,” Center for Media and Child Health,” http://www.cmch.tv/mentors_parents/tv_movies_suggestions.asp. Cf. See Turpin, *Branded*, 175.

which youth can view films on the large screen in theaters, at home on their televisions, DVD players, or computers, or on any number of devices such as iPods, iPads, or cell phones.

2) Nurturing theological reflection on films. My intention is to provide a space in which young people can dialogue theologically with film. This aim draws upon Rogers' emphasis on reflection that draws out a religious narrative's conceptual possibilities.⁴⁷ As detailed earlier, religious narratives provide the substantive ground from which theological convictions emerge. According to Rogers, a component of narrative pedagogy is nurturing capacities that include discerning and articulating theological concepts that are embedded within religious narratives, understanding how such concepts and moral principles are incarnated in narrative experience, and relating conceptual insights from different religious narratives. This includes listening to a film on its own terms and then offering a response from an understanding of one's experience and faith. Young people might learn from a film's portrayal of life. Here the film can provide a broader perspective on how to understand life and how it can be lived. In youth ministry programs, youth workers and adolescents can dialog with film to reflect upon its glimpse of life. Also, they can see a film on its own terms and reflect upon how it deals with issues of life such as relationships, social structures, and values.

3) Empowering youth to become agents of cultural change. The third purpose is to empower youth to become agents of cultural change in face of the films they view. This aim draws upon Rogers' call to empower youth to mobilize for social change in their

⁴⁷ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 28.

communities.⁴⁸ Here youth are not deemed as objects of domestication by films but subjects empowered to make a difference in the narratives of their lives to heal our broken world.

In Boal's work, participants are called to engage in action. Drawing upon Freire's work in developing critical consciousness, Boal transforms spectators into "spect-actors," who can engage actively in theater exercises, games, improvisations, storytelling, and acting.⁴⁹ Rogers seeks to teach individuals to act through engaging issues from their communities and analyzing the issues critically, and to transfer such action into their lives and communities.

To facilitate empowering adolescents as agents of change, youth workers can invite adolescents to reflect upon issues and problems they observe in the films and in their lives. Furthermore, they can dream of alternate plotlines and, then, be invited to create and act in their own films based upon these more life-giving plotlines and transfer such acting into their lives.

Advantages

The pedagogies of Rogers and White will serve as foundational instruments for addressing intervention and encouraging positive relationships. This will in turn inspire youth to reflect critically upon the content of films that they view. The questioning of such images with adolescents might address aggression as they critique scenes of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁹ See Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Adrian Jackson, trans. (New York: Theater Communications Group, 1985), 126-130. See also Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Adrian Jackson, trans. (London: Routledge, 1992), 164-201.

violence that they deem unacceptable. Thus when communities view images of violence that is rewarded, they can label them as such.⁵⁰

Viewing such films with youth might have the following benefits:⁵¹ 1) Addressing the enculturation of films, 2) Developing critical consciousness toward films influencing youth, and 3) Empowering youth to become agents of change.

1) Addressing the enculturation of films.⁵² I am concerned about the possible influence of films upon the socialization of young people. Furthermore, that which young people view through the films' perception of life might influence their attitudes, behaviors, and values. Due to the problematic content of films that young people might view, I advocate reflecting critically upon the negative influences of films and learning from the positive socialization.

2) Developing critical consciousness toward films influencing youth. According to Rogers, cultural narratives, including films, are ideological.⁵³ They serve the aims of the individuals behind them. Inspiring girls to buy into a fantasy film's princess mythology or boys to buy into an action film's mythology of domination, such films have assumptions and agendas. In view of the issues in the lives of the youth including anorexia and violence in their communities, the problematic images of films that they might view need a critical consciousness toward them.

3) Empowering youth to become agents of change. In view of the kind of enculturation and assumptions that our youth might subconsciously internalize Rogers

⁵⁰ See Rich et. al., "Aggressors or Victims," 673. Cf. American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, "Media Violence," 1224. Cf. also Michael Rich, "CMCH Suggestions," Center for Media and Child Health," http://www.cmch.tv/mentors_parents/tv_movies_suggestions.asp.

⁵¹ See Michael Rich, "CMCH Suggestions," Center for Media and Child Health," http://www.cmch.tv/mentors_parents/tv_movies_suggestions.asp. Cf. See Turpin, *Branded*, 175.

⁵² See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 103-107.

⁵³ Ibid., 107-110.

reminds us that they can and should question such assumptions, consider alternative perspectives, evaluate them through reflective criteria and, then, own and internalize perspectives that are more life-giving.⁵⁴ Such critical consciousness is the means of becoming fully human subjects.⁵⁵ Thus no longer the passive consumers of problematic film content, such subjects can become active agents who discern negative messages from the liberative ones and choose the narratives by which they can live.⁵⁶

Approach on Ways in which Film Can Be Utilized

The First Movement

The first movement is to create safe spaces in which to listen to the adolescents' experiences of films.⁵⁷ This movement draws upon Rogers' insight to provide a safe space in which deep encounters can take place.⁵⁸ According to Rogers, the cultivation of a safe space is an important approach to narrative pedagogy for facilitating such encounters. For such an environment of trust at the initial and subsequent gatherings, I have established the following ground rules to ensure safety and openness to the diverse voices of the youth:⁵⁹ 1) Confidentiality. That which is shared in the space needs to stay within the space. 2) No judgment. No one critiques that which other individuals share. 3) Diversity is good. All perspectives are welcome. There are no wrong questions or answers. 4) The option of sitting out on difficult scenes. The researcher introduced the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 110-112.

⁵⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Co., 1984).

⁵⁶ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 110-112.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

ground rules, emphasizing the right to sit out, particularly when screening violent images in action and horror films.

To make the environment safe, I didn't utilize R-rated films although some of the most popular films among the youth were R-rated. Also, I screened violent films that the youth had already seen so that the project might not somehow harm them. I worked toward utilizing and arranging comfortable spaces within the facilities that were available. Thus I arranged chairs for participants to maintain a comfortable distance from the screen and for viewing the film and for dialoging. Also to make the environment inviting, I offered refreshments. I encouraged the participants to share their voices and listen for the voices of the other participants. Moreover, I explained the pilot research project, provided consent forms, and ensured that their identities would remain confidential. Also before gathering the larger groups, I divided them into smaller groups.

The Second Movement

The second movement is to screen the film. Steps include the following: 1) Selecting films capturing the interest of youth to nurture their critical consciousness and 2) Preparing to engage the film.

1) Selecting films that capture the interest of youth to nurture their critical consciousness.⁶⁰ This step complements that of Rogers' work to expose youth to cultural narratives that shape them.⁶¹ Doing so helps to nurture among them a critical consciousness toward such narratives that impact youth subliminally through the film's assumptions and values. Options for selecting films that capture the interest of youth

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 116.

include the following: a) Compiling a list of genres, b) Reflecting upon the work of directors, and c) Reflecting upon films that engage spiritual issues.

a) Youth workers can compile a list of filmic genres with the youth, rank the genres according to popularity among the youth, and list films within each genre that are the most popular. In this way I selected the most popular action, comedy, and horror films among adolescents: *Casino Royale*, *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, *Blades of Glory*, *She's the Man*, *Disturbia*, and *Red Eye*.

b) Reflecting upon the work of directors. This step draws upon Rogers' insight to ask critical questions about the storyteller. According to Rogers, ideological agendas can be revealed by asking questions including, "Who do you think wrote this story—a man or a woman, a child or an adult?, Whose interests are being secured, and whose are being violated?, Who keeps telling this story in our community, and how do they benefit from its implicit agenda?"⁶² Youth workers can help the youth to compile a list of filmmakers who have created the most popular films among the youth, compile a list of films they have created, and engage the films from each filmmaker.

c) Reflecting upon films that engage spiritual issues. This step draws upon Rogers' call to bring to young people's awareness the religious narratives that shape their lives.⁶³ Youth workers can help youth to compile a list of films that might address spiritual themes such as God, faith, suffering, evil, community, love, and life after death.

2) Preparing to engage the film. Options for preparing to engage the film include the following: a) reflecting upon the space, b) facilitating a dialog, c) introducing the film, and d) observing the film.

⁶² Ibid., 117.

⁶³ Ibid., 112.

a) Reflecting upon the space. This step draws upon Rogers' suggestion that youth workers need to attend to the space that teens will utilize.⁶⁴ For screenings at youth ministry sites, youth workers can preview the film, explore its relevant background, check the audio-visual resources, and ensure that the space is comfortable and hospitable. Youth workers can screen videos or DVDs at youth ministry rooms, sanctuaries, retreat sites, and homes. Also, they might view current films at theaters.

b) Facilitating a dialog. This step draws upon Rogers' insight on educational contexts, which are based upon a "banking" philosophy in which teachers with cultural knowledge deposit such knowledge into the minds of passive students.⁶⁵ He argues that such education is dehumanizing, for it treats students as objects, domesticates them into passive listeners, and denies human agency. The youth worker may be wary of "banking" in screening. The youth worker is not a lecturer on the meaning of each film but a facilitator.

c) Introducing the film. While the youth worker can provide brief, relevant contextual material, he or she should allow the youth to observe and enter the realm of the film. This step draws upon Rogers' insight to engage the group of participants.⁶⁶ In his work, young people are invited to explore in a communal setting a narrative art form. He argues that in order for this work to be real and alive, the teens' engagement needs to be cultivated.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

d) Observing the film. Rather than moving directly into interpretation, the youth worker can allow the youth to begin with their initial reactions and observations of the film. This step draws upon Rogers' focus on helping youth experience the narrative.⁶⁸

The Third Movement

The third movement of my approach is to nurture a critical consciousness of films.⁶⁹ Drawing upon the work of David White, this movement offers an individual the opportunities to listen and understand the complexity of factors impacting adolescents, intellectually engaging their contexts, including cultural narratives. For this movement, an individual needs the practices of observing and describing as well as reflecting critically. Thus this movement involves observing and describing the films that influence youth.

Options for nurturing a critical consciousness of films include the following: 1) Surfacing the ideological assumptions in films, 2) Engaging the emotions of the participants, and 3) Exploring elements of the filmic medium.

1) Surfacing the ideological assumptions in films can take place through the following options: a) Asking critical questions about the filmic narrative, b) Asking critical questions about the filmmaker, c) Utilizing conceptual grids, d) Contrasting the ideological agenda with competing values and assumptions, and e) Inviting youth to explore a film's social function.

a) Asking critical questions about the filmic narrative. This step draws upon Rogers' insight to ask critical questions about a cultural narrative to reveal the subliminal,

⁶⁸Ibid., 42.

⁶⁹ See White, *Practicing Discernment*.

ideological assumptions within it.⁷⁰ Questions can include the following: i) What does this action film's plotline assume about violence or the possible rehabilitation of the "bad guys?" ii) What stereotypes in this film are reinforced about marginalized people?⁷¹

b) Asking critical questions about the filmmaker. This step draws upon Rogers' method of critical questions about the narrator to reveal the subliminal, ideological assumptions within a cultural narrative.⁷² Questions can include the following: i) "Who might have created this film—a man, a woman, a person of color, an Anglo person, a child, or an adult?"⁷³ ii) "Whose interests are being secured, and whose are being violated?"⁷⁴ iii) "Who keeps perpetuating this narrative in society, and how do they benefit from its agenda?"⁷⁵

c) Utilizing conceptual grids. For example, youth can utilize Walter Wink's myth of redemptive violence⁷⁶ as a grid to analyze filmic violence.⁷⁷ According to Rogers, similar templates can be provided about the narrative arc common to princess plotlines, the core message in marketing to youth, or the bias to blame the victim in narratives involving sexual assault. Questions can include the following: i) "What does Walter Wink's myth of redemptive violence reveal about the subliminal assumptions within this action film?"⁷⁸ ii) What do Katherine Turpin's insights on princess dreams and spiritual

⁷⁰ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 117.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13

⁷⁷ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 118.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

formation in consumer culture⁷⁹ reveal about the subliminal assumptions within this princess plotline? iii) What do Turpin's insights on conversion from consumer faith⁸⁰ reveal about the subliminal assumptions in this product placement? iv) "What do Jack Zipes' insights on creative storytelling⁸¹ reveal about the subliminal assumptions blaming the victim in this horror film involving sexual assault?"⁸²

d) Contrasting the ideological agenda with competing values and assumptions.⁸³ According to Rogers, the myth of redemptive violence in action films can become more apparent when viewed in contrast with competing values and assumptions.⁸⁴ Questions can include the following: "What do insights from principles of nonviolence, practices of forgiveness, and conditions of an accountable reconciliation reveal about the myth of redemptive violence within this action film?"⁸⁵

e) Inviting youth to explore a film's social function. According to Rogers, ideological agenda can become more evident when youth workers ask youth to reflect upon a film's social function.⁸⁶ Ideological agendas might include justifying a war or selling merchandise. Questions can include the following: i) "What is the function this filmic narrative serves in society?"⁸⁷ ii) "What are the ideological assumptions implied in the film?"⁸⁸

⁷⁹ Katherine Turpin, "Princess Dreams: Children's Spiritual Formation in Consumer Culture," in *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, Eds., Mary Elizabeth Moore & Almeda M. Wright, 45-61 (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ See Turpin, *Branded*, 90.

⁸¹ Jack Zipes, *Creative Storytelling* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4

⁸² See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 118.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

2) Engaging the emotions of the participants. This second option for nurturing a critical consciousness draws upon Rogers' insight that participants should reflect on their personal encounters with narratives, asking questions on what surfaced for them and what they experienced.⁸⁹ An aim of filmmakers is to evoke feelings from the viewers experiencing the narrative. Such viewing enhances their experience of the film. Notably, filmmakers seek to elicit the feelings among the viewers as experienced by the characters. For example, the director of the thriller/horror film, *Red Eye*, Wes Craven, films a hotel employee, Lisa Reisert, racing home to ascertain the safety of her father, whom an assassin threatened to murder. There the assassin confronts and attacks Reisert to murder her as well as her father. Such scenes might be especially frightening to youth who have been victims of violence. They might project their visceral emotions onto the woman, causing the film to be even more suspenseful and frightening. As the narrative reaches its climax, the emotions of the youth might subside. Yet they can reflect critically by asking how they felt during different scenes in the plot. The youth leader can ask: What emotions did you feel while you watched the scenes?

3) Exploring elements of the filmic medium. This third option for nurturing a critical consciousness draws upon Rogers' suggestion to identify the narrative elements.⁹⁰ He argues that teens should attend to the narrative elements, for this teaches them the essential components common to the narratives.⁹¹ The elements of the filmic medium include the following: i) Writing, ii) Performance, iii) Staging and camera, iv) Cutting, and v) Sound and music.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁹¹ Ibid., 146.

i) Writing. Roles of screenwriters can include creating the dialog, outlining the action, and setting the theme. Screen plays might be modified by the actors. Figurative techniques include motifs,⁹² symbols,⁹³ and metaphors.⁹⁴ Generally, point of view concerns the narrator through whose eyes the events of the film are viewed. Often the ideas and events are sifted through the consciousness and language of the narrator. Films might be literary adaptations of books or plays. Questions can include the following: If the film has symbols and metaphors, what are they and how do they help the film to communicate? Whose point of view is the film told from?

ii) Performance. Actors can help viewers to identify with them. Viewers might relate to their circumstances and see themselves in the character's place. Thus the actor might represent the viewer on the screen. Actors might make use of the following: voice,⁹⁵ body,⁹⁶ observation,⁹⁷ endurance,⁹⁸ and confidence.⁹⁹ Questions can include the following: Why might have the filmmakers chosen these actors and actresses?

iii) Staging and camera. The framing of visual elements in filmic staging is significant because it is a means of communication. Analysis of film shots might include that which is included and excluded in the shot, where objects and characters are placed,

⁹² Motifs include techniques and objects that are repeated systematically in films without calling attention to themselves. Motifs are not always apparent, for their symbolic significance does not necessarily emerge or detach itself from its context.

⁹³ Symbols imply additional meanings that are relatively apparent to the observer. Symbolic meanings can shift with the context.

⁹⁴ Typically, a metaphor is a comparison that is not true literally. Sources of metaphors include cutting. For example, two shots might be linked to produce a third, symbolic idea. There might be a sense of shock in the metaphorical comparison. Thus two traits might be joined in violation of what might be expected commonly.

⁹⁵ Voice includes the use of intonation, pauses, and volume to express the character.

⁹⁶ Body pertains to the use of facial express and body movements in the film.

⁹⁷ Observance pertains to the study of real life used in the role.

⁹⁸ Endurance pertains to actors repeating scenes repeatedly at the same emotional level until the director captures that which he or she aims to achieve.

⁹⁹ The actor's work can require in his or her interpretation and the director' vision because they are required to shoot out of sequence and at a variety of emotional intensities per day.

how colors are arranged, the use of foreground and background, and how characters are arranged in conveying the film's message. With the camera, filmmakers utilize the movement of images of objects and characters within the film to convey meaning to the audience. Analysis of movement might include the manner in which the camera moves in relationship to the scene as well as the movement of characters and action within the scene in conveying the message of the film. Questions can include the following: What types of camera shots does the director use, and how do they affect how we react to the scenes?

iv) Cutting. The editing or structuring of images in relationship to one another in the film is significant in conveying meaning. Questions can include the following: Are the shots fragmented or lengthy, and what does the cutting add to the film?

v) Sound and Music. Filmic sound includes the language, sound effects, and music. The language reflects the actor directly. Sound effects convey the environment and emotions of the actors. The music directs the emotions of the audience. It conveys the mood in the film. Questions can include the following: What types of sounds and music does the film use, and how do they add to the film?

The Fourth Movement

The fourth movement of my approach is to provide opportunities to dream, reflecting theologically.¹⁰⁰ This movement draws upon White's insight on dreaming and Rogers' invitation to reflection that draws out a religious narrative's conceptual possibilities.¹⁰¹ According to Rogers, religious narratives provide the substantive ground

¹⁰⁰ See White, *Practicing Discernment*, and Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*.

¹⁰¹ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 45.

from which theological convictions emerge. One component of narrative pedagogy is nurturing the capacities, which include discerning and articulating theological insights that are embedded within religious narratives, understanding how abstract concepts and moral principles are incarnated in narrative experience, and relating conceptual insights from religious narratives.¹⁰²

Dreaming, reflecting theologically, can take place through the following options:

1) Engaging the experiences of youth, 2) Engaging the faith traditions of youth, 3) Reimagining the filmic narrative, 4) Presenting narratives that embody different assumptions, and 5) Asking youth to reflect upon the values they wish to promote and embody.

1) Engaging the experiences of youth. This option allows the adolescents to explore the insights that emerge when the content of the films and their lives and faith traditions are engaged through a dialog. Such interpretation draws upon resources for response. Youth workers can ask the following question: How do the scenes relate to your experiences in life?

2) Engaging the faith traditions of youth. This option allows the adolescents to engage their faith traditions more deeply, empowering them to resist the negative influence of films. Exploring such insights will enable the adolescents to deepen their faith by allowing them to understand how God is present and working in their lives. Youth workers can ask the following question: What are the insights about God that you got from the scenes?

3) Reimagining the filmic narrative. According to Rogers, youth workers can expand the imaginative possibilities surrounding a narrative, thus dislodging the

¹⁰² Ibid.

“givenness” of a culturally sanctioned version, and nurturing an awareness that ideologically destructive narratives can be retold with more liberative values and assumptions.¹⁰³ One can ask, “What if...” questions, provoking different filmic narrative outcomes, to re-imagine the film. Youth workers can ask the following questions: a) “What if the character were trained in self defense?”¹⁰⁴ b) “What if a terrorist weren’t a monster but a grieving father whose daughter was killed by an American bomb?”¹⁰⁵

4) Presenting narratives that embody different assumptions. As Rogers observes, some storytellers have collected empowering reconstructions of domesticating princess narratives.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, he notes that youth can be exposed to narratives of biographies of perpetrators of violence, victims who found forgiveness and perpetrators willing to make amends through processes of restorative justice and accountable reconciliation, all serving as compelling alternatives to redemptive violence.¹⁰⁷ Youth workers can ask the following questions: a) “What do insights from the variations on the filmic narrative reveal about the myth that the narrative can only be told in one way?”¹⁰⁸ b) “How do the variations on the filmic narrative reveal the ideological agenda of this film?”¹⁰⁹

5) Asking youth to reflect upon the values they wish to promote and embody. Here youth can explore critical questions about the values within the film. This step draws upon Rogers’ insight to invite teens to articulate the values they want to promote

¹⁰³ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 120.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

and embody.¹¹⁰ He argues the purpose of critical reflection approaches to narrative pedagogy is not to indoctrinate young people into an alternative ideology different from the one they have already internalized. In contrast to such domestication, critical reflection entails becoming conscious of personal and cultural assumptions, holding them in light of rational scrutiny, and choosing which values and viewpoints to espouse and live out. Thus youth workers need to create a space for teens to discern among the various perspectives available and to articulate a synthesis of the values and viewpoints to affirm and embody.¹¹¹ Within films, characters personify values. For example on the one hand, the protagonists might reveal traits that communities admire. Such characters might achieve their aims in films despite opposition from the antagonists as they exemplify the values that are significant to a culture. For example, in an action/fantasy film, *Return of the King*, a hobbit, Frodo journeys with his friend, Sam, to Mount Doom to destroy a ring sought by lord Sauron who wants to use it to rule Middle-earth. Frodo draws upon his values to persevere courageously. Antagonists, on the other hand, typically embody the negative values that oppose the viewpoint of the film. Notably, antagonists are not limited by the value constraints of protagonists. Yet even with these fleeting strengths, they do not prevail. Usually they are held accountable for their negative actions. For example, in *Return of the King*, accountability for negative actions is portrayed as the conflict between Frodo's and his friends, and Sauron and his forces seeking to rule Middle-earth resolves. As the protagonists attain their aims, the values become established. The youth leader can ask the following questions: a) What were the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

values shown in the film? b) Which character would you most like to be, and why? c) How might you live out something you saw or learned from engaging the film?

The Fifth Movement

The fifth movement of the researcher's approach is to provide opportunities for acting.¹¹² This movement draws upon the final aspect of White's pedagogy of critical consciousness.¹¹³ Here the individual can ask how the previous steps of the pedagogy call us to change our actions or shape our behaviors. Action needs to follow reflection. Both are needed. Actions are reflected upon and reshaped. The pedagogy provides opportunities for youth to act upon their reflections and to learn from on-going reflection of their actions in order to refine and redefine them. By acting, adolescents are able to move beyond the typical fun and games of youth ministries to participate in God's work in their communities. Thus they can be agents, not passive consumers or objects that are acted upon. Instead, they can have roles in which they partner with God in serving among those with needs and brokenness and thus enact healing in the world.

Acting can take place through the following options: 1) Exploring how the participants are able to reflect upon ways they can become agents of change in their communities. 2) Youth can create their own films to embody an alternative mythology to filmic narratives popular among adolescents.

1) Exploring how the participants are able to reflect upon ways they can become agents of change in their communities. This step draws upon Rogers' insight to embody

¹¹² See White, *Practicing Discernment*.

¹¹³ Ibid., 188.

the liberative agency rehearsed on the stage in the real-life contexts of the participants' lives.¹¹⁴ According to Rogers, the purpose of liberative narrative pedagogy is not simply to provoke conversation or to fill an evening with an inspirational role-play. Instead, it is to discover potential interventions that can subvert oppression and mobilize adolescents to implement such interventions.¹¹⁵ Thus the youth leader can ask the participants: Within the context of this group, how are you able to reflect upon ways adolescents can become agents of change in their communities?

2) Youth can create their own films to embody an alternative mythology to filmic narratives popular among adolescents. According to Rogers, the process of narrative critical consciousness is completed when youth create their own narratives, claiming a self-authorship grounded in the personal truth of their considered viewpoint.¹¹⁶ Here youth workers can invite youth to create films from critically reflective perspectives with a critical consciousness or as a human rights activist raising awareness of injustice and violence. According to Rogers, recreating cultural narratives completes the transformation from passively and uncritically absorbing narratives to authoring narratives as an active subject.¹¹⁷ Then such empowered agency contributes to and shapes the culture in which the youth lives.¹¹⁸ According to Rogers, "the narratives youth conceive and tell, like those already culturally hallowed, have the power to alter perceptions, influence values, affect discourse, and inspire change."¹¹⁹ Such narratives can embody a radically alternative mythology to cultural narratives currently dominant in

¹¹⁴ See Rogers, Jr., *Finding God*, 180.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 122.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

North America.¹²⁰ According to Rogers, they can challenge assumptions, stir controversy, and provoke public dialog.¹²¹ Furthermore, they demonstrate not only the critical capacity of youth but also their acceptance of the call to shape the culture they once absorbed.¹²² According to Rogers, this is the power of critical reflection. Thus youth can move from uncritical cultural assimilation and engage society as critical thinkers.¹²³ According to Rogers, it is a radical process in which passive consumers become prophets.¹²⁴

Program

The pedagogy can be utilized briefly at a single youth group program, or it be utilized for a longer series over a period of several weeks. The following is an example of how to structure a program:

The program and generative films can be discussed at the first meeting. Before the second meeting, the leader creates a schedule based upon the dates the youth are available and the resources needed for each session. During each session, the leader can offer an agenda for the time together.

The first meeting of the program can set the stage for the rest of the meetings together. The leader can structure the program to ensure that the youth participating can understand the program and that they are invited to share freely and raise questions. The first meeting of the program can focus upon an introduction and compiling a generative movie database.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

During the first meeting, the leader can share concerns, which should include an aim to create a safe space to make possible a discussion to emerge. The leader can discuss what kinds of films they want to engage.

The group might decide to consider action, comedy, and horror films. The program can be open to the questions and insights that emerge in relation to each type of film. The youth workers and youth can share interests in facilitating the discussions, and planning and structuring the sessions. Furthermore, the group can create the insights together. Thus the group can brainstorm the issues they want to engage, and the youth worker can provide a schedule and format to explore the issues. Also, the youth worker can offer resources. The remainder of the first meeting can be utilized to discuss how we consume films, the types of practices the youth engage in, and the kinds of films they enjoy.

The group can spend the remaining time of the first meeting envisioning a schedule of meeting dates and times that would work for the remaining sessions. After discussing what the group wants to reflect upon, and which dates work well, the youth worker can create a schedule for the rest of the meetings together. The youth worker can conclude the session with a space for reflection.

The subsequent session can feature a film. The researcher scheduled the session according to the schedules of the youth workers and adolescents of the youth ministry programs. During the gathering, the youth worker can provide refreshments, welcome the participants, and introduce the session. Then the youth worker can screen the film. After screening each film, the youth worker can divide the larger group into smaller ones to address some or all of the following *discussion questions*: What does this action film's

plotline assume about violence or the possible rehabilitation of the “bad guys”? What stereotypes in this film are reinforced about marginalized people? Who might have created this film—a man, a woman, a person of color, an Anglo person, a child, or an adult? Whose interests are being secured, and whose are being violated? Who keeps perpetuating this narrative in society, and how do they benefit from its agenda? What does Walter Wink’s myth of redemptive violence reveal about the subliminal assumptions within the action film? What do Katherine Turpin’s insights on princess dreams and spiritual formation in consumer culture reveal about the subliminal assumptions within the princess plotline? What do Turpin’s insights on conversion from consumer faith reveal about the subliminal assumptions in the product placement? What do Jack Zipes’ insights on creative storytelling reveal about the subliminal assumptions blaming the victim in the horror film involving sexual assault? What do insights from principles of nonviolence, practices of forgiveness, and conditions of an accountable reconciliation reveal about the myth of redemptive violence within the action film? What is the function this filmic narrative serves in society? What are the ideological assumptions implied in the film? What emotions did you feel while you watched the scenes? If the film has symbols and metaphors, what are they and how do they help the film to communicate? Whose point of view is the film told from? Why might have the filmmakers chosen these actors and actresses? What types of camera shots does the director use, and how do they affect how we react to the scenes? Are the shots fragmented or lengthy, and what does the cutting add to the film? What types of sounds and music does the film use, and how do they add to the film? How do the scenes relate to your experiences in life? What are the insights about God that you got from the

scenes? What if the female character in the action (or horror film) were trained in self-defense? What if the terrorist in the action film weren't a monster but a grieving father whose daughter was killed by an American bomb? What do insights from the variations on the filmic narrative reveal about the myth that the narrative can only be told in one way? How do the variations on the filmic narrative reveal the ideological agenda of this film? What were the values shown in the film? Which character would you most like to be, and why? How might you live out something you saw or learned from engaging the film? Through this group, how are you able to reflect upon ways adolescents can become agents of change in their communities?

The program can allow the adolescents to engage the films in a process of meaning making and to reflect upon new ways in which they might engage in acting, or living out what they learned. The project can allow them to make connections between the lives portrayed in the films with the participants' lives in their community. When the youth reflect upon issues and problems portrayed in the films, they can envision alternative ways in which they might react to similar issues and challenges in life.

Chapter 6

Methodology

I. The Methodology

A. Research Framework and Purpose

In qualitative research, questions stem from a general theme as opposed to a hypothesis. Qualitative research enabled this project to obtain data on adolescents gathered from their thoughts and reflections. Through the qualitative research process, I listened to the voices of the adolescents and their experiences, which randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs might miss. I did not start using established expectations. Instead, I searched with observations and inductive logic for groupings and themes stemming from the data throughout the project.¹ Qualitative research enabled me to listen in-depth to the adolescents' attitudes, perceptions, opinions, and social and contextual knowledge that impact them.

Qualitative research allowed the project to highlight experiences and processes from the adolescent participants of the proposed project group and to offer descriptions from the adolescents on their empowerment drawing upon their experience of the films and the influence the films might have upon them. Thus I sought to provide a better understanding of how youth listen to and value the voices of the other participants. Also, my research was aimed at uncovering adolescents' perception of their experiences of the films. Furthermore, I sought to understand how the youth might have an impact on their communities as well as the different ways they can utilize film as a medium with which to engage critically. I endeavored to

¹ Donna M. Mertens, *Research Methods in Education and Psychology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998).

understand the efficacy of the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies for youth to learn to reflect critically upon their experience of films. The qualitative research was based upon participatory action research for its method, research orientation, and data collection.

Using participatory action research, I sought to learn about adolescents both directly, from listening to the voices of the adolescents, and from an interpretation of the experiences of the youth via observation. Such information was gathered through active immersion and participation in the activities of the youth.² The project sought to obtain an insider's view as opposed to an outsider's view, i.e., perspectives in terms meaningful to the adolescent participants as opposed to those of an outside observer. It was my intention to learn about the adolescents' viewpoints as well as their experiences of films and to share their reflections on their experiences. Thus, as in Freire's vision, this program is designed for the youth worker to learn from the adolescents' perspectives and not simply from his or her own perspective. The behaviors that were focused upon within the project were the adolescents' viewpoints and experience of the films that surfaced during the project. Thus the adolescents in the project provided a window of understanding through their reflections on their communities and by their reflections on the content of the films. I utilized group discussions in which the participants shared insights emerging from their experiences of the films.

This study utilized qualitative research based upon participatory action research to analyze the experiences of youth ministry adolescents viewing films during their youth group programs. A vision for qualitative research stemming from the work of psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1944 is that of participatory action research. This approach offers firsthand knowledge of empirical phenomena. Participatory action research assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the shared creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and seeks

² Ibid.

an interpretative understanding of a subject's meanings. Thus participatory action research emphasizes research in the subject's contexts. Participatory action research recognizes that the categories and concepts of analysis arise from the youth worker's interactions within the participants' natural contexts and questions about the data. Furthermore, participatory action research posits that that which one perceives as real in terms of objective knowledge is based upon one's own perspective. Thus utilizing participatory action research, the youth worker can seek to discern that which participants define as real and where their definitions of reality direct them. The researcher's attention to detail in participatory action research sensitizes adolescents to multiple realities and the multiple viewpoints within them.

Furthermore, participatory action research affirms relationships with participants wherein they can share their experiences in their terms. It allows the group leader to discern their experiences with an openness to their feelings and experiences. The researcher utilizes questions to gather data and discern meanings behind them. And emphasis is placed in participatory action research on the youth worker analyzing the data repeatedly in developing new ideas.

Participatory action research was an appropriate method for this study as I sought to develop an understanding of the utilization of films in youth ministry through the study of youth perspectives and experiences of films. This approach recognized the importance of entering the adolescents' contexts to understand their experiences, acknowledged subjective experiences within their contexts, rejected the youth worker's position as the expert observer, and moved analysis away from objectivist procedures into a direction in which the researcher sought to understand and interpret emerging meanings within the contexts of the participants. Furthermore, utilizing participatory action research was an effort to move toward a deeper understanding of the experiences of adolescents and their voices on the impact of films upon their lives. Utilizing

participatory action research was appropriate for this pilot project as it emphasized a relationship between the researcher and the participants, and the emergence of meaning, which was participatory and developing.

B. Filmic Sources

For screening the films, I selected the most popular films shaping youth. Such selection complements that of Rogers' work to expose youth to cultural narratives that shape them. Doing so, I sought to nurture among the adolescents a critical consciousness toward narratives that impact them subliminally through the films' assumptions and values. The most popular action, comedy, and horror films among my group of adolescents were the following:³ *Casino Royale*, *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, *Blades of Glory*, *She's the Man*, *Disturbia*, and *Red Eye*.

1. *Blades of Glory*

In a comedy film, *Blades of Glory*, rival male figure skaters, Chazz Michael Michaels and Jimmy MacElroy get into a scuffle on an awards platform at a world championship skating competition. Thus the skating foundation bans them from further competitions. Consequently, Michaels toils reluctantly in children's ice shows where he abuses alcohol and acts out his sexual fantasies leading to his firing. MacElroy works as an overqualified skating salesperson. Through a fan who stalks him, MacElroy, as well as Michaels, discover that they can qualify for competitions if they participate in pair figure skating. Unable to find partners, they decide to become an all-male pair. They learn to cooperate and win their first competition. Thus they draw

³ *Casino Royale* was popular among the youth in the pilot project while the other films were the most popular films both among the youth in the pilot project and among adolescents nationally.

the attention of a renowned skating pair, Stranz and Fairchild Van Waldenberg, who seek to sabotage the efforts of the pair.⁴

2. *Casino Royale*

In an action film, *Casino Royale*, a British agent, James Bond, shoots an informant, beats and shoots the informant's assistant in a restroom, and attains the status of 007. On his first mission as an agent in Madagascar, he chases a bomb maker and shoots him in an embassy. Then a representative from the British Treasury accompanies him as he enters a card game organized by a banker to fund terrorists. During the intermission, attempts are made to murder Bond. After winning the game, he is tortured by the banker.⁵

3. *Disturbia*

In a horror film, *Disturbia*, an adolescent male, Kale, watches his father being killed in an automobile accident. While grieving, he beats a teacher who makes a comment about Kale's father. Thus he is placed under house arrest. There using binoculars he spies upon his neighbors. In one scene, he watches a married neighbor having a sexual encounter with his maid. Also, he spies upon young males watching pornographic scenes on their television. After an adolescent female, Ashley, moves next door, he begins to spy on her, watching her swim and undress. Afterward, he spies on a neighbor, Mr. Turner, whom he suspects to be a serial killer. Along with

⁴ The film includes profanity, sexual activity, a decapitation, a reference to incest, and alcohol as well as drug abuse.

⁵ The film has numerous scenes of sexual encounters, profanity, and violence, including disturbing images of Bond being stripped and tortured.

his friend, Ronnie, Kale and Ashley investigate.⁶

4. *Red Eye*

In a thriller/horror film, *Red Eye*, a hotel employee, Lisa Reisert, drinks with a stranger, Jackson Ripper, at an airport lounge. After boarding a plane, she sits adjacent to him. While the plane ascends, he reveals that he is an assassin, hired to assassinate the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security who made arrangements to stay at her hotel. Thus he threatens to kill her father if she fails to assist him by authorizing a room change for the Deputy Secretary so that he can be assassinated.⁷

5. *Return of the King*

In an action/fantasy film, *Return of the King*, a hobbit, Frodo, journeys with his friend, Sam, to Mount Doom to destroy a ring sought by lord Sauron to rule Middle-earth. On the journey, they are tempted by the ring and led by a guide, Gollum, who once owned the ring and became corrupted by it. Their friends, led by a wizard, Gandalf, and Aragon, stand against Sauron's forces seeking to rule Middle-earth.⁸

6. *She's the Man*

In a comedy film, *She's the Man*, a female adolescent soccer player, Viola, discovers that her sport has been cut from her school's program. Thus she poses as her twin brother, Sebastian, while he studies abroad, to play for his soccer team. She falls in love with Sebastian's roommate,

⁶ Scenes include the father's death in an automobile accident, profanity, undressing, young males viewing pornographic scenes on a television screen, adolescents consuming alcohol, murders, and images of stabbings as well as corpses.

⁷ The film includes scenes of violence including a stabbing of a throat, references to rape, and fighting.

⁸ While the film contains violent depictions of war, it does not glorify violence.

Duke. He is already in love with another student, Olivia. Olivia falls in love with Sebastian, who is Viola in disguise.⁹

II. A Description of the Program

A. Study Population, Participants, and Setting

The project's participants included early, mid, and late adolescents from four youth ministries of faith communities in Northeast Los Angeles. These faith communities were an evangelical church, an Asian American evangelical church, a Latin American evangelical church, and a Wesleyan church. The pilot project consisted of twelve African American, Anglo, Asian American, and Latino adolescents. Three of the youth were Asian American, five were Latino, two were African American, one was Anglo, and one was both Latina and Asian American. The youth included eight females and four males who were ages twelve through twenty.

B. Participant Recruitment

I mailed letters to communities of faith in Northeast Los Angeles. These letters were followed by phone calls. After receiving permission from the youth workers of these communities of faith, I invited their youth to participate. Visiting their youth programs, the project leader explained the project. The adolescents and their parents signed consent forms to allow the youth to participate in the project. The forms explained the purpose and nature of the research. The project also informed the adolescents that their identities would be kept confidential.

⁹ Scenes include profanity, fighting, and Sebastian removing his clothing before a crowd to reveal his genitals as well as Viola removing her clothing to reveal her breasts.

C. Researcher Roles and Youth Responsibilities

The project directed student leaders to draw from the set of discussion questions utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies during the group discussions.¹⁰ Then the project gathered and examined the data pertaining to these questions.

The project gathered and examined the data pertaining to the questions utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies. The project leader directed the logistics and implemented the research with the youth. Adolescents from communities of faith in northeast Los Angeles in the project participated. Those who aspired to become directors and actors or actresses became student leaders who asked the discussion questions. All of the youth selected the discussion questions and shared their experiences on the content of films during the group discussions. The adolescents viewed the films and made critical observations upon the narratives as the films connected with their lives. I introduced the pilot program utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies to collect data on the adolescents' experiences of the films. I developed questions to help the adolescents to reflect critically upon their experience of the content of the films. The focus of the project was upon listening to and understanding their experiences of films including the influence of the films upon their lives. During the first session, I shared the purpose and nature of the project with the adolescents and explained the method during the session. During the subsequent sessions, I introduced the sessions. Then a student leader facilitated the discussion to allow the participants to share their perspectives during the group discussions after viewing the films. Following the group discussions, I interviewed each youth on his or her experiences. Then I prepared future sessions. The interviews shaped the subsequent sessions on the adolescents' experiences of the films.

¹⁰ See p. 134.

While the project took place, I sought to accommodate the schedules of the adolescents and their youth programs. The program took place during the time of their youth events. At times, the project needed to take place after such youth events when the youth programs needed to conduct their own activities. I directed the project through conversation with the youth program leaders. I sought to make the project space a safe environment in which the youth could share their experiences. I also informed the adolescents that there were no wrong answers in sharing their viewpoints.

D. Data Collection

I collected information through group discussions on the films as well as interviews following the viewing of the films. Thus I gathered the data, which was recorded with the permission of the youth. Such data collection was made possible by a utilization of the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies, which enabled listening to and understanding the voices of the adolescents. I gathered the adolescents together in order to view and discuss their experiences of the content of the films. A student leader facilitated the discussion. Then I interviewed the adolescents after they viewed the films in order to collect information on their experiences and reflections on the pilot project. The project directed youth workers to draw from my set of discussion questions during the group discussions.¹¹

¹¹ See p. 134.

E. Data Analysis

The project examined the data, which was gathered to listen to and understand the adolescents' experiences of film. According to Glaser and Strauss,¹² data analysis continually requires both coding and analysis. Thus I examined the categories by comparing the groupings with each other and checking for common themes that arose. The themes were the helpfulness of the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies applied to film, challenges and problems in the communities of the youth, engaging communities with social action, and engaging faith and film.

F. The Program

The pedagogy was utilized for a series over a period of thirteen weeks. Here I will describe the pilot program: The program and generative films were discussed at the first meeting. Before the second meeting, I created a schedule based upon the dates the youth were available and the resources needed for each session. During each session, I offered an agenda for the time together.

The first meeting of the program set the stage for the rest of our meetings together. I structured the program to ensure that the youth participating knew about the program and that they were invited to share their voices freely and raise questions. The first meeting of the program focused on introduction and discussing the movie database.

During the first meeting, I shared concerns, which included an aim to create a safe space in which discussion could emerge. I discussed the work of Rogers and White, and moved to a discussion of the films. I explained that the group would have the opportunity to reflect upon

¹² Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Adline Publishing Co., 1967).

film popular among the youth.¹³ Such selection complements that of Rogers' work to expose youth to cultural narratives that shape them. Doing so helps to nurture a critical consciousness toward such narratives that impact youth subliminally through the film's assumptions and values. I utilized the most popular films among the youth. The program would be open to the questions and insights that emerged in relation to each type of film. I invited the youth to participate by facilitating the discussions and planning as well as structuring the sessions. Youth who were interested in careers in film expressed an interest in facilitating the group discussions. All of the participants would create the insights together. Thus the participants brainstormed the films they wanted to engage, and I provided a schedule and format to explore the films.

The group spent the remaining time of the first meeting planning a schedule of meeting dates and times that would work for the remaining sessions. The group's aim was that each participant would attend every meeting. After discussing which films the group wanted to reflect upon and which dates worked well, I created a schedule for the rest of the meetings together. I concluded the session with a space for reflection.

The next part of the program took place over a period of six weeks. Each session engaged one of the following films: *Casino Royale*, *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, *Blades of Glory*, *She's the Man*, *Disturbia*, and *Red Eye*.

The following is an example from the pilot program: One session engaged the film, *Casino Royale*.¹⁴ I scheduled the session according to the schedules of the adolescents and youth workers of the youth ministry programs. Before the sessions took place, I created a schedule indicating the dates of the youth ministry programs and the audio-visual materials needed for

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The film has numerous scenes of sexual encounters, profanity, and violence, including disturbing images of Bond being stripped and tortured.

each session. At the outset of the pilot program, I introduced the aim of the program. During the gathering, I provided refreshments, welcomed the participants, and introduced the session. Then I invited the adolescents to take notes on their observations and screened the film.

After screening the film, I divided the larger group into smaller ones led by student leaders to discuss the following questions, which the youth and their youth workers selected (I include representative responses):

What emotions did you feel while you watched the scenes?

(Amanda: I felt that the scenes were intense with all the guns, violence, and torture. I was disgusted by the way the man was tortured.

Stacy: I felt tense and nervous because I was worried that James would end up dying.)

How do the scenes relate to your experiences in life?

(Alicia: I was bullied at my old school by students. They had dangerous objects like knives. My brother was shot. He supported you when you needed help.

Amanda: It reminds me of my friend getting mugged by some guys.)

Did you disagree or agree with the actions of the characters in the film and why?

(John: I agree with the actions of Bond. He was just doing his job.

Alicia: I think the girl made the right decisions of defending herself.)

What were the values shown in the film?

(Amanda: The movie shows using violence no matter what the cost to achieve your goal.

Stacy: The film showed violence, swearing, and cheating on your spouse.)

How does the film influence your views on people?

(Alicia: Be careful who you trust.

Amanda: There are good guys and bad guys in this world.)

How does the film influence your views on products?

(Stacy: The Sony laptop that was in the movie showed the laptop was a good quality laptop. The Ericsson cell phone looked high-tech and dependable.)

(Alicia: I didn't realize that movies had so many products to buy.)

What are stories or teachings from the Bible that come to mind?

(John: Trust one another. Justice will be served.

Stacy: Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies.)

How might we live out something we saw or learned?

(Amanda: We can try to be role models.

Stacy: We should not live a life similar to James' life. We can reflect on how a Christian should live life differently.)

What was most helpful about the pedagogies of empowerment applied to youth ministry through films?

(Stacy: The questions made me think critically about movies with a new perspective rather than just watching them for entertainment.

John: We reflected on values that we can live out.)

What was least helpful about the pedagogies of empowerment applied to youth ministry through films?

(Amanda: It's hard to find things about movies.

Alicia: I like to watch them to enjoy them, not deeply think about them.)

I received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students about the program. Such feedback supports the validity and promise of the program. The following are their responses:

Esther: This was full of fun. It gave me hope from talking about movies. We learned a new way to see movies. I'm so happy you came to share this.

Amanda: I don't know where I'd be without your program. You challenged us and showed us how we can use movies to deal with problems in life. I'm glad you came.

Grace: I'm happy you came. You listened to our hearts. This impacted me in a deep way. It was moving to hear our stories. Thank you for being here. I just want to tell you how glad I am you came.

Cathy: Thank you for the program. I'm glad that I can use it to know about movies more clearly since a lot of movies are hard core. This will help my faith to grow each time I see movies.

Thank you for teaching us and listening to all our struggles.

Stacy: This was a blast! Thank you for everything. A big part of why it was a great experience for me was because you cared. You made sure we were doing all right. You checked up with us a

lot even though the youth group time was short. I appreciated all the food you brought us and all the encouragement you gave us when we shared and the things we learned.

Christy: I'll remember your compassion. I appreciate the chance to be here. It helped me deal with so many areas of my life.

Alicia: I'm glad that I came. This is amazing. The understanding I got from movies will make a difference in my life. I just want you to know how glad I am I came. I have learned so much. My faith is growing thanks to this. I'm sad that you will not be here next week. Thank you for taking good care of us. Our world will be better off because we'll use this in our community.

John: Thank you for taking time to do this for us. You gave us so much wisdom for watching movies. I'm happy you came to our youth group in this time. I hope you can come again and teach us.

Les: I'm glad you came to our youth group. I hope God blesses you. If all the people on earth were here, we would have peace in this world. Thank you for coming in my time of need. You inspired us to be better people. We felt God's love in you.

Jessie: You did so much for this youth group. I will miss this.

Colleen: It's been a great adventure all these weeks. I'm really sad that you're leaving us. But I know that this will help others just like how it changed me. Thank you for everything—the food, discussions, and just all the amazing stuff we learned from each other. I hope we'll see you in the future.

Leonard: I just want to let you know what a great influence this had on my life. I'm glad you came. Thank you for everything. I hope you'll come back.

Ken: You've been an inspiration to us. This made us grow in our spiritual lives.

The project allowed the adolescents to engage the films in a process of meaning making and to reflect upon new ways in which they might engage in acting, living out what they learned. According to the participants, the project allowed them to make connections between the lives portrayed in the films with the lives of the participants and individuals in their communities. When the youth reflected upon issues and problems portrayed in the films, they envisioned alternative ways in which they might react to similar issues and challenges in life. At the close of the session on *Casino Royale*, the adolescents suggested the following for acting/living out what they learned: After reflecting upon the violence in *Casino Royale*, the participants suggested inviting a speaker to discuss the use of violence in the military and participating in a march for peace.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This project took place among twelve adolescents in northeast Los Angeles. These youth included African American, Anglo, Asian American, and Latino adolescents ages twelve through twenty. Utilizing the pedagogies of Rogers and White, the project examined their experiences of their viewing of the most popular films among them.

This project revealed that the adolescents are not accustomed to engaging the films critically when they view them. Typically, films are viewed merely as forms of entertainment without questioning their content. Some of the general comments youth made about film include: “It’s hard to find things about movies.” “I like to watch them to enjoy them, not deeply think about them.” Also, in contrast to studies that focus upon the negative effects that the viewing of films have upon youth, the project reveals that viewing films utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies enabled them to gain helpful insights from films. According to one student, the movie “helps us to think about how girls should be treated.”

The project informs youth workers on how youth ministries might provide spaces for their adolescents to learn how to view films while reflecting critically upon them. The youth expressed the helpfulness of the opportunities to discuss the films. John noted that the youth had the opportunity to reflect upon “important values that we can live out.” Such engagement allowed both youth and their youth workers to reflect upon issues and problems in the communities of the youth using a format that was relevant. Stacy revealed that the project addressed the issues of bullying at her school. Thus an examination of the adolescents' film-

viewing experiences addresses the issue of the influence of film upon youth. In the project, the participants viewing the films expressed that the project allowed them to reflect upon how they related to the views of the actors and actresses and the ways in which they reacted to issues or challenges presented in the films.

While the adolescents revealed that they were not accustomed to reflecting critically upon films, they also noted that the project provided a helpful space with which to discuss and reflect upon films. According to Stacy, the project helped her to “think critically about movies with a new perspective rather than just watching them for entertainment.” As indicated by studies on the influence of films upon youth, such content can affect their attitudes and behavior. Furthermore, the participants revealed that reflecting on the films utilizing the critical consciousness and narrative pedagogies enabled them to gain insights on relational skills for their interactions with their peers. One participant, Ken, said, “I need to respect girls a little more. This made me stop and think about girls’ feelings.” Thus their experience of viewing the films and subsequent critical reflection will inform the ways in which they might engage issues and problems in their communities. Here the project reveals how films might influence them in positive ways. This contrasts with studies that focus more upon the problematic influences of films upon the behavior of youth.

This project allowed the adolescents to interact with the films in a process of meaning making. It also served as a medium through which youth could reflect upon new ways of acting in the world and responding to media. According to the participants, the project allowed them to make connections between their own lives and life as portrayed in the films. When the youth reflected upon issues and problems portrayed in the films, they envisioned alternative ways in which they might react to similar issues and challenges in their own lives. Also, they were able

to compare the relationships among the characters on the screen with their personal relationships. For example, according to Amanda, the project allowed them to reflect upon how we can try to be role models.

An examination of the experiences of the adolescents of the films reveals their meaning making of their own experiences. Their reflections on the violent content of some of the films led some to give voice to the brokenness they experienced from violence within their communities. Their reflections revealed ways in which they planned to deal with such violence in their communities. As Amanda made clear, "Violence is not OK."

The project also revealed the helpfulness of the pedagogies of Rogers and White for guiding students to reflect on the content of the films and upon the actions might be prompted by their reflections. Such positive behavior includes caring for their communities, relationships of peace with their peers, and engaging issues and problems in their communities. Colleen noted that the group discussion allowed her to reflect on the values she wished to live out: "I realized that I should treat everyone the same. I shouldn't discriminate."

Some participants voiced their agreement with some of the problematic content and behaviors of the characters. For example, one participant felt that the violent actions of the protagonist at an embassy in *Casino Royale* were justified. John noted that he agrees with the actions of Bond, who was "just doing his job." Another participant was in agreement with the negative behavior of a central character in *Blades of Glory* since the character was humorous. Leonard stated that he could identify with Chazz, for he "does things to make people laugh."

The project allowed the adolescents to share and discuss their views with their peers and their youth workers. Also, the project revealed that adolescents do not typically discuss films with the youth groups at their communities of faith since the screening of films falls outside of

the agenda of the faith communities or since they do not have resources to engage with the films effectively. According to one youth worker, “We don’t talk about films at our youth program. That’s not part of our purpose.” Yet such a discussion would allow the adolescents and their youth workers to reflect upon the questionable behavior of characters. Otherwise, the negative content of films might simply become part of problematic narratives, which might inform the actions of youth should they encounter similar issues or problems in life.

An examination of the responses shows differences between the boys and girls. More of the girls noted learning relational skills than did the boys. Colleen observed: “I realized that I’m not very good at forgiving people. Now if I’m mad at a friend, I’ll try to forgive. If people can risk their life for a friend, I should be able to do something as simple as helping them with their chores.” This difference is greater between early adolescent boys and early adolescent girls. Also, more boys responded more positively than did girls to the problematic behaviors of the characters in the films. As Leonard noted, he agree with “how the James Bond character used firearms. A firearm could help me in a lot of situations. It’s OK to retaliate. I need to be firm with people like him.” And Ken stated that he could identify with Bond: “I agree with 007 because it’s OK to use violence. Maybe one day I could be a 007.” Thus more of the boys were in agreement with the violent behavior of the characters in the content of the films. Such data underscores the importance of talking with boys in particular about helpful ways to deal with violence. The data also raises awareness of the need to engage issues of relationships between genders. The actions of male characters in films affect the formation of the attitudes of boys. This data suggests that boys are influenced by gender patterns that are reinforced by films during a significant stage of their development. The greater ability of the boys to relate to the violent images in the content of the films suggests that violent images might be perceived to be more

acceptable behavior among males. Such influential narratives need to be addressed by the youth groups of faith communities. While teaching critical reflection on film among youth, these communities can also address relational skills. Here youth workers have a vital role in providing helpful resources utilizing the pedagogues of Rogers and White as they journey with the youth.

There exists a gap in the literature on the influence of film upon the formation of adolescent identity. And youth groups of faith communities have not taught youth to reflect critically upon film. This project adds to the literature by examining the experiences and accounts of adolescent exposure to film. Adolescents already view films within their own social groups. During the awkward years of adolescence when young people struggle to relate to other individuals and might be reticent to dialogue with adults, they are often left alone and marginalized in their journeys toward adulthood.¹⁵ The adolescent journey is rife with confusion as they face an increasing awareness of who they are and what they might desire to become. While inundated by the images and values of popular culture within films that they view and lacking tools for reflecting critically upon them, adolescents might shape their identity and sense of self based upon the ideologies of filmmakers and marketers. However, youth workers can use this medium as a springboard for discussion to teach their youth, equipping them to reflect critically upon the content of films and discern life-giving narratives to guide their lives during the turbulent years of adolescence.

¹ See Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, "Disorganized Religion," in *Disorganized Religion: The Evangelization of Youth and Young Adults*, ed. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1998), 235.

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